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TV SET: DAVIES AND STAR/GETTY IMAGES
LES DAWSON: R. POPLOWSKI/FOX PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES



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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Forteant Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM GIBBONS & SONS LTD

DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide

by Seymour Distribution Ltd.

2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT

Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001

Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to

info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine

Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50

Forteant Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Forteant Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 500, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

REST OF THE WORLD £55; US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED

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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
Circulation 14,320 (Jan-Dec 2015)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899

© Forteant Times: MAY 2017

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

GHOSTS IN THE GLOBAL MACHINE

FROM PENDA'S FEN TO HOOKLAND

Folklore has been tied inextricably to place for most of its history: communities and cultures, varying in size from village to nation, tend to share and pass on traditions, stories, customs or beliefs. Much of this stuff – or at least its variant forms – is stubbornly local, tied as strongly to particular landscapes and places as a ghost to its haunted house or a lake monster to a specific body of water. Of course, such lore can also become the material that defines a people to itself, or can be consciously employed to do so, as in the various expressions of Romantic nationalism in the 19th century, from Grimm's collections of fairy tales to the tone poems of Dvorák. Alternatively, the geographical specificity of the folkloric can inform unofficial identities that in some sense circumvent formalised history: the Neo-Romantic strand of British art in the 1930s and 40s, for example, exemplified by the work of Nash, Piper and Sutherland, was a response to the British landscape signalling a return to a chthonic sense of identity, a reconnection to something older and stranger than anything recorded in the history books.

But what happens when the spirit of place that breathes life into lore meets modernity? Faced with massive technological and social change, might it simply disappear, or be swept away on a tide of federalism or globalisation? While this seems the likeliest scenario from a 21st century vantagepoint, there are others. A surprising alternative scenario would be one in which these very folkloric elements somehow colonise the geography-abolishing media technologies one would have expected to signal their disappearance.

In this month's cover feature (pp30-37), Bob Fischer examines an odd phenomenon whereby the ephemeral cultural products of a period centred on the 1970s – children's television programmes and music for schools,

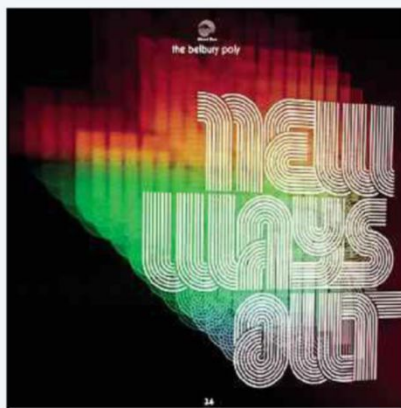
public information films and paperback books – mined the traditional materials of folklore, often refracted through a distinctively British Neo-Romantic vision, but went on to become a new kind of lore for the generation that grew up imbibing them. From *Music, Movement and Mime* to *Penda's Fen*, the slightly off-kilter cultural products of this time have taken on a new

lease of life as half-forgotten scraps of cultural ephemera haunting those who have, in turn, been inspired to create music and artwork that attempts to evoke this woozy sense of nostalgia for something simultaneously comforting and disquieting – what Bob Fischer describes as “cosily wrong”.

Perhaps this haunted generation

is unique: after all, much of the stuff that's haunted them all these years was the product of the BBC, a national institution with a monopoly on our television screens: the flickering myths of the 1970s were, in that sense, as local as could be – a nation talking to itself in the language of lore for an age of emerging urban legends.

One wonders whether such weird shared memories and odd nostalgias will ever haunt us again. In a world where hundreds of TV channels compete with computer games and social media for children's attention, surely only the most fractured, factional and subcultural folklores can hope to emerge in the future, divorced from place if not necessarily community, which, after all, can be re-imagined online. Meanwhile, though, the hauntological imagination still breaks through: on Twitter, one can visit the ‘forgotten’ and very spooky English county of Hookland (see p38-39), where the old customs still linger and unfashionably local ghosts lurk in the heart of the global machine.



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

BLOOD ON THE DEVIL'S CHESSBOARD

A possibly Islamist-inspired attack on Saunière's famous church is the latest twist in the long-running saga of Rennes-le-Château. **RICHARD STANLEY** reports from the scene.

The 'Rennes-le-Château mystery' was one of the greatest esoteric riddles of the 20th century, an elaborate hoax built on the shadowy outlines of a genuine enigma – the puzzling actions of everyone's favourite evil clergyman, Bérenger Saunière, whose inexplicable wealth succeeded in putting this remote village on the map (see FT101:28-31, 198:56-59, 343:52-53).

It was tremendous fun while it lasted, but in recent years Rennes has lost some of its weird lustre with the passing of many key personalities and the extensive remodelling of the site in a relentless quest for tourist revenues. On Sunday 23 April, the day of the French elections, a bizarre assault was launched on the Church of St Mary Magdalene that may prove to be the final nail in the mystery's coffin.

Shortly before midday, a raven-haired woman in her late teens or early 20s, asked local restaurateur Morgan Marrot if she could use his bathroom to wash her hands. A few minutes later, she re-emerged from the stall wearing a long white cape and a crimson wolf mask. Retreating into the Lourdes grotto, the masked woman made a long telephone call in Arabic. Then, brandishing an axe, she strode into the church to launch a violent assault on the famous statue of Asmodeus, the guardian of all occult knowledge. After pulverising the demon's head and severing its arms she placed a Koran beside its dismembered remains. Loudly reciting Surahs in Arabic,



LEFT: The famous Devil figure in the Church of St Mary Magdalene was decapitated and his arms severed.

evil and it is said that we must not idolise statues," she insisted. "Today is a day of presidential election, while in Syria the West bombs and kills children. My husband is there! You are all disbelievers! "

A security perimeter was established around the village and a bomb squad called in as the authorities tried to make up their minds whether they were dealing with a genuine terror attack or an act of religious mania. The authorities seemed to settle on the latter, and the woman, whose name has not been released, was subsequently transferred from police custody to a local psychiatric hospital.

Given Rennes's propensity for drawing in every conspiracy theory known to mankind, a head-on collision between Asmodeus and militant Islam may have been inevitable, a surreal display of iconoclasm, redolent of all the contradictions and challenges faced by the world beyond this isolated plateau, a location seemingly removed from everyday life, yet which registers and reflects its tensions as surely as the tremors in a spider's web. Some long-term mystery watchers, however, are suggesting the destruction of Rennes's iconic demon may mark the final station on the village's road back to rustic oblivion. This year happens to be the centenary of Saunière's mysterious death on 17 January 1917, a date still commemorated locally as 'Blue Apple Day'.

she climbed over a railing to furiously attack the altar, decapitating the celebrated bas-relief of Mary Magdalene.

The stunned onlookers finally raised the alarm, summoning the mayor, Alexandre Painco, who succeeded in disarming the assailant, before alerting the gendarmerie. As she calmly waited to be placed under formal arrest, the mayor asked the young zealot why she had committed these acts. "The Devil is the representation of





UNDEAD RECKONING

The mediæval zombies of Wharram Percy

PAGE 08



CANINE SAVIOURS

More tales of deathless doggy devotion

PAGE 20



CARDBOARD CRYPTID?

Was famous Oz tiger photo really a hoax?

PAGE 23

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

NOEL ROONEY struggles with a quiet news period in the Conspirasphere, but finds that traditional news media have unexpectedly picked up the slack...

MAINSTREAM MANIA

It's not so very long ago that the phrase 'conspiracy theory', if it was used at all in the mainstream media, was uttered with a heavy lacing of either derision or moral revulsion. In a sense, this still holds true; when media outlets carry stories from the Conspirasphere on their main pages, they invariably lace their opening paragraphs with normalising shibboleths: 'kooky' or 'wacky' if the desired response is derision, 'outrageous' or 'dangerous' if a moral knee-jerk is required. And yet ...

Scouting for material for this column recently, and finding myself a bit short on inspiration, and the usual outlets less excited than usual, I put a few conspiracy-related search terms into Google: 'latest conspiracy news', that sort of thing. I assumed I would be directed to Prison Planet, the Truthseeker, Before It's News, or some of the higher profile websites dealing in tabloid conspiracy fare for the less discerning porters of tin foil headwear.

The Truthseeker did make the first page of results, but only just. It was last on a list that included several of the UK's best-known newspapers ('paper' is almost quaint in its anachronism now, but news-aether doesn't yet have the same ring to it). The *Sun*, the *Daily Express*, the *Independent*, *Huffington Post*, even the BBC (Auntie, how could you?) all took greater prominence. I was mildly intrigued, assuming that a combination of paid search and clunky Boolean algorithms had conspired to throw a few random phrases in the way of the real stuff.

But it turns out that several news outlets now devote pages of their online periodicals specifically to the Conspirasphere. This is perhaps unsurprising in the case of the *Sun* and the *Express*; but the *Independent* seems an unlikely candidate for conspiracy news outlet (incidentally, the Beeb's search results were actually just Boolean red

herrings, thank goodness). None of the pages are particularly well curated or kept up to date; several of the stories were a few years old, and a lot of the stories were more 'wacky news' than your actual conspiracy material. But their existence represents a considerable irony.

The advent of citizen journalism is part of the process that has seen traditional news media suffer a huge decrease in readership and, more importantly, trust on the part of readers. Article after article appears in the more august of these organs despairing at the apparent inability of the average reader to discern the real stories among the post-factual, un-checked torrent of amateur news available online. Yet at the same time, these outlets are running content designed to appeal to the same readers they are lambasting for lack of news nous.

It is a truism of journalism that a news outlet's job is to sell its readers to the advertising industry (no, not you; *FT* is more high-minded than that). And no doubt several of the media bodies concerned will argue that they are presenting these stories for the amusement of their more sophisticated readers. But there is, I suspect, more than a mere postmodernist convolution of confectionary realism at work here. The Conspirasphere is not some lonely satellite of the real, wandering in a perennially distant orbit like a wannabe Nibiru; it is a core part of the thinking, of the real world, of a large proportion of the population now. As an audience, we've gone from 'now that's just silly' to 'I could believe that' in less than a generation. This is not a sign of delusion on our parts (or if it is, it's the madness of an extremely large crowd); it's a mirror that an increasing number of us hold up to the world as presented to us via the media, Chomsky's 'correcting lens of irony' taken to a logical end. Ten years hence, what will the media landscape look like?

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

CAROL-SINGING POLAR BEAR IS THREATENED WITH AN ASBO

Times, 15 Dec 2015.

Baby and toddler sale

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Jan 2016.

BUDDHIST MONK WENT ON A TYRE-SLASHING RAMPAGE AFTER STEPPING ON INSECT

Hull Daily Mail, 21 Jan 2016.

Cats smother cardinal

Arizona Daily Star, 22 Jan 2016.

MEDIEVAL ANIMALS TALK

Hull Daily Mail, 4 Feb 2016.



CAGLIOSTRO'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

The alchemist and occultist Count Alessandro Cagliostro is one of history's legendary figures; equally fabled is the collection of mysterious items and magical artefacts he assembled during his travels. Despite having disappeared at the time of

its owner's death, the collection recently reappeared in London for a short time, having been added to in the intervening centuries by later owners. After years during which selected items were shown only to certain discreet individuals, the current curator of Dr Cagliostro's Cabinet of Curiosities, one Oskar H Hejll, agreed to entrust part of this unique collection to the Atlantis Bookshop in Bloomsbury, where – according to proprietor Geraldine Beskin, “it

was displayed in an atmosphere simpatico to the great man's memory”. The bookshop is the only stockist of *Dr Cagliostro's Cabinet of Curiosities: Investigations of the Unknown Vol III*, the book that illustrates further marvels from this arcane archive. Clockwise from above: Possibly the shrunken head of Percy Fawcett; dart to inject werewolves with silver nitrate; mermaid skeleton; the Golem of Chelm.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

SIDELINES...

OFFICIAL CRYPTID

Last February, Washington Senator Ann Rivers introduced a bill to make Bigfoot (aka Sasquatch) the "official cryptid" of Washington State. The measure said that Bigfoot had "made immeasurable contributions to the state's cultural heritage and ecosystem." [AP] 20 Feb 2017.

SPOILSPORT

Also in February, New Mexico State Senator George Munoz sponsored a bill to ban state-funded colleges from hunting for mythical creatures. This followed news that the previous October Dr Christopher Dyer at the University of New Mexico led an expedition to find Bigfoot in the Sandia Mountains that cost taxpayers \$7,000. In addition to Bigfoot, the bill also proposed to ban publicly funded searches for Pokémon, leprechauns and the Bogeyman. [NBC] 13 Feb 2017.

DISTRACTED BY SASQUATCH

A 50-year-old woman from Tensed, Idaho, was driving south on US Highway 95 late at night on 22 March when she struck a deer near Potlatch. She told police that she had seen a Bigfoot chasing a deer on the side of the road while driving. She checked her mirror to get a second look at the "shaggy" 7ft (2.1m) beast, and when she looked up, the deer ran in front of her. [AP] *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*, 25 Mar 2017.

SORCERY ARREST

Masahiro Suto, 52, was arrested on 7 February in the town of Fujioka, northwest of Tokyo, after allegedly trying to curse a woman by sticking a nail into her effigy after she had spurned his advances. She had suffered no ill effects, but prosecutors were considering a charge of threatening behaviour. The use of mannequins in cursing enemies has a long history in Japan. *Times*, 8 Feb 2017.

UNDEAD RECKONING | Mediæval burials stopped corpses rising from grave

Fears that the dead may return to make a nuisance of themselves have been around for centuries. Archaeologists studying 137 bone fragments dating from 11th and 14th century from Wharram Percy in North Yorkshire showed cut marks on the skulls and upper body bones that indicated deliberate mutilation after death. As reported in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*, the bones showed bodies were decapitated, dismembered and burnt. Theories that the bodies were treated in this fashion because these people were viewed as outsiders or that their remains were cannibalised by starving villagers were considered but discounted by scientists from Historic England, and the University of Southampton proposed the treatment of the bodies was



HISTORIC ENGLAND

intended to stop corpses from arising from their graves. Simon Mays, skeletal biologist at Historic England, was quoted by the *Guardian* as saying: "The idea that the Wharram Percy bones are the remains of corpses burnt and dismembered to stop them walking from their graves

seems to fit the evidence best. If we are right, then this is the first good archaeological evidence we have for this practice." This led the *Guardian* to suggest that "The research... may represent the first scientific evidence in England of attempts to prevent the dead from walking and harming the living – still common in folklore in many parts of the world."

In fact, it would be more accurate to describe this as the first physical evidence of such a practice in England during the Mediæval period, outside chronicles from the period such as that of William of Newburgh in 1197 which featured four accounts of walking corpses, three of which were subject to mutilation and burning to cease their perambulations.

In British archaeology such 'ghost killing' was unknown until evidence was revealed in 1985/6 that ghosts were being destroyed in Iron Age in Yorkshire. Previous archaeological evidence of mutilation practices proposed as anti-revenant measures or precautions during the Iron Age appeared in *Current Archaeology* (Jan 1987), concerning the excavations at Garton in Yorkshire, which contained multi-period burial sites with evidence that ceremonies had been performed to lay ghosts. Interestingly, this site is just 11 miles (18km) from Wharram Percy. The introduction of the article (pp234-237) reads: "When powerful men die their ghosts sometimes return to haunt the



BOTH PHOTOS: HISTORIC ENGLAND

TOP: Wharram Percy in North Yorkshire, where anti-revenant measures were in use. ABOVE: Evidence of burning and knife marks on bones found at the site.



HISTORIC ENGLAND



TOP: A skeleton found buried-face down, with the tongue apparently severed and a flat stone thrust between the teeth.

living. When such men die therefore it is important to kill off their ghosts as well". Dr Ian Stead of the British Museum stated: "The most spectacular part of the excavation consisted of the barrows with the ghost killing ceremony. They were easily distinguished from the majority of the barrows by being round". Each skeleton was lying crouched on its side in a deep pit and accompanied by spearheads, which had been stuck into the body when actually in the grave.

The original aim had been to find a chariot burial for the British Museum and, resulting from a magnetic survey by Tony Pacitto, a potential site was discovered at Garton Station. Excavations revealed a number of Anglo-Saxon burials and the chariot that now resides in the Museum's exhibition.

It was found that seven spears were thrown at the one body buried with a sword behind his back, and as the earth was tossed back, seven more such weapons were cast in.

Another corpse, with a toe ring, had 11 spears thrown at it and yet another four iron and three bone spears. Dr Stead commented: "It is tempting to wonder whether we have here the rite of ritually killing a corpse to ensure that the ghost did not return to haunt the living" *Guardian*, 3 April 2017.

A skeleton from the third or fourth century AD, with the tongue apparently severed and a flat stone pushed into the mouth, was discovered at

Stanwick near the River Nene in Northamptonshire 1991, but research on the bones has only recently been published by Historic England. One theory put forward suggests that the man had mental health issues and severed his own tongue; or was it a harsh form of punishment? "The fact that he's buried face down in the grave is consistent with somebody whose behaviour marked them out as odd or threatening within a community," said Simon Mays. "It's a way of stopping the corpse from rising from its grave and menacing the living."

Other face-down or prone burials have been discovered previously in late Roman cemeteries. In 2014, a team from the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology at the Vatican discovered the bones of a 13-year-old girl buried in the early Middle Ages face down in front of a church at San Calocero in Albenga, northern Italy. (*Sydney*) *D. Telegraph*, 9 Oct 2014; *ibtimes.co.uk*, 23 Jan 2017.

Rocks have been in the mouths of other skeletons – for example in two eighth century skeletons in Co Roscommon, Ireland [FT283:18], and one found in a 1576 plague pit near Venice [FT249:18]. A male skeleton found in 2014 in Kamien Pomorski, Poland, about 500 years old, had the front teeth knocked out and a rock inserted in its mouth; and the legs had been pierced through [FT316:14].

In 2012, near a monastery in the Black Sea town of Sozopol

in Bulgaria, archaeologists found two 13th-century skeletons pierced through the chest with iron rods, supposedly to stop them from turning into vampires – a practice common in some Bulgarian villages up until the first decade of the 20th century... and indeed much later. The rite was performed in Romania as recently as 2004, when Petre Toma, 76, a supposed vampire, was dug up, his chest opened with a wooden stake, and his heart removed and burnt [FT187:22].

A grave in the central Bulgarian town of Veliko Tarnovo, at least several centuries old, contained the skeleton of a man in his 30s tied to the ground with four iron clamps, while burning embers had been placed on top of his grave. Around 100 similar burials have been found in Bulgaria, with more in neighbouring Serbia and other Balkan countries. Another recent find was 3,000 Czech graves where the bodies were weighed down with rocks to keep the dead in their place [FT291:20].

Similar vampire 'remedies' were practised in New England in the 19th century – records of at least 16 cases have been found [FT80:46-47]. It was believed that those who died of tuberculosis returned from the dead, feeding on the blood of their kinsfolk and causing them to waste away. Dead consumptives were sometimes disinterred, their hearts burned and the ashes used in medicine.

SIDELINES...

NESSIE HUNT

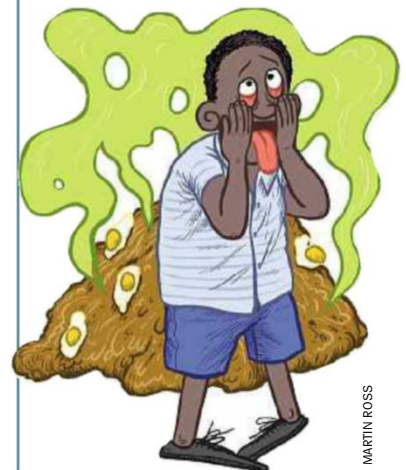
Prof Neil Gemmell of New Zealand's University of Otago plans to look for traces of unusual DNA by gathering water samples from Loch Ness. "All large organisms lose cells as they move through their environment," he said. "From a few litres of water we can detect thousands of species." The hope is that one of them could be Nessie. *D.Mail*, 3 April 2017.

CATFISH FROM THE SKY

On 3 April, Leonard and Dawn Vanderpool of Winter Haven, Florida, heard a loud crash on their screened porch and found a large, live catfish in their backyard pool. They called police to help them get it out of the water. It had talon marks on its back and had probably been dropped by a bird of prey. [UPI] 6 April 2017.

SMELLY RITE

Residents of Daboase in Ghana performed a six-day exorcism in a bid to expel evil spirits following a directive by the Tufuhene, the regent of the town. Residents were told to dump solid waste from their homes with eggs on top on the main road near the Senior High School. This caused two students at the school to "speak unintelligibly", but they were "subdued" by a pastor. *Yen.com.gh* (*Ghana News*), 22 Feb 2017.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

VERY CROSS PURPOSES

A man dressed as Jesus and holding a huge cross accidentally smashed it through the ceiling of a metro station as he rode up an escalator on 28 February, exclaiming "Oh shit!" He was part of a carnival in Cologne. *Metro*, 1 Mar 2017.

NEW ELEMENTS

On 1 December the periodic table welcomed four new elements: Nihonium (Nh – No.113); Moscovium (Mc – No.115); Tennessine (Ts – No.117); and Oganesson (Og – No.118). All elements up to No.94 occur naturally, while the others are made in the lab. Oganesson, the heaviest element so far, is named after the Russian physicist Yuri Oganessian. *D.Mail*, 2 Dec 2016.

ALARMING THEFT

Thieves made off with hundreds of burglar alarms from a lorry parked overnight in a lay-by on the A14 near Cambridge while the driver slept in his bunk. He awoke at 4am to discover the theft. *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Nov 2016.

MACABRE TEACHING AID

Even since they were exhumed and identified in 1985, the bones of Josef Mengele, the German doctor who conducted horrific experiments on Auschwitz inmates, lay unclaimed in a plastic bag in São Paulo, Brazil. The remains of the so-called "angel of death" are now being used in forensic medical courses at the local university's medical school. *Guardian*, 13 Jan 2017.



MARTIN ROSS

A GREEK GOD

Prince Philip's retirement from public life, heralded by a cyclone, is big news on Tanna



ANDERS RYMAN / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The villagers of Yaohnanen. BELOW: Prince Philip poses in 1980 with the pig-killing club sent him by the people of Tanna.

The Duke of Edinburgh's imminent retirement from public life will have a special significance for residents of Tanna, one of 83 islands in the tropical Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu. On 5 May 2017, the day of the announcement, Cyclone Donna was heading towards Tanna. About a fifth of the population of 30,000 islanders pray to the cantankerous ex-navy officer, whom they regard as divine. "Here in Tanna, we believe that Prince Philip is the son of our God, our ancestral God who lives up in the mountain," said villager Nako Nikien, who prefers to go by the name Jimmy Joseph. Joseph said it's become a tradition to talk, or pray, to Philip each evening, when villagers from Yaohnanen and Yakel gather in their meeting places and share an intoxicating brew made from the kava plant. "We ask him to increase the production of our crops in the garden, or to give us the sun, or rain," Joseph says, pausing. "And it happens".

Those prayers became more pressing after Cyclone Pam ripped through Tanna in March 2015, killing at least five on the



island and destroying homes and crops. The cyclone was thought to portend a visit to the island by Philip the following year, fulfilling a prophecy by the late Fred Nasse. "Prophet Fred, as he was known, died a few years ago," said aid worker Andrew Finlay in April 2015. "He was highly respected and several of his predictions came true. He predicted a large lake around the volcano would drain, and it did. He predicted there would be no cyclones for seven years, and that came true. So when

he predicted that the world would converge on Tanna for a great event in 2016, they have no reason to doubt it. It's a short leap to connecting that to Prince Philip." The Duke failed to turn up in 2016, but faith wasn't dented. Now the weather gods appear to have spoken again.

Matthew Baylis, author of *Man Belong Mrs Queen* (2013) who has lived on Tanna, says the latest cyclone may be seen as an indication the Duke has reached a higher sacred status, similar to local 'taboo men' who are separated from others and subject to various restrictions. "They told me that they see Philip's living in a Palace, surrounded by guards, and travelling in a car with darkened windows, as evidence of his taboo status," he said. "So they may well see his withdrawal from public duties as connected to that – having attained some higher rung of taboo, sacred status. Equally, they might think he is preparing to come 'back' to Tanna, in some form, spiritually or bodily."

The Prince Philip Movement seems to date from 1974, when he and the Queen



TORSTEN BLACKWOOD / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Sikor Nathuan, the current chief, displays the two official portraits sent to the Tanna people by the Duke.

visited Vanuatu on the Royal yacht *Britannia*. According to Yaohnanen folklore, the son of a mountain spirit travelled over the seas to a distant land, where he married a powerful woman and in time would return to them. He was sometimes said to be a brother to John Frum, ("John from America") of the celebrated cargo cult, named after a GI who came with 'cargo' (weapons, food and medicine) in World War II.

Tannese legend has it that during a reception at the consulate in the capital Port Vila in 1974, the Duke shook only the hands of men from Tanna. That news reached the residents of Yaohnanen, who were waiting for a gift in return for a pig they had given to a British officer some years before. The tribe sent a letter to Port Vila, asking where their gift was and enquiring about the Duke. In response the British delivered a framed portrait of the Duke, and the worship began. Villagers sent the Duke a *nal nal* hunting club, which he duly posed with in London, sending a photograph back. Another framed photograph arrived in 2000. A warrior

"The old people will shed their skins like snakes and become young again"

named Jack Naiva, village chief of Yaohnanen, was one of the paddlers of a war canoe that greeted the royal yacht in 1974 and became convinced that the Duke (who was born in the same year as him) was a descendant of a Tanna spiritual ancestor. Philip sent the tribe a letter of condolence when Chief Jack died in 2009. All the correspondence, news clippings and flag-draped photographs are kept in a special bamboo shrine.

The Tannese still choose to live as they have for centuries, in simple thatch huts and wearing nothing but grass skirts or penis shields called nambas. Known as *kastom*, it's a traditional way of life that's under threat from the spread of Western civilization. Down a winding, rutted dirt track far from anywhere, people

feel free to live this way, but when they make the trek to the island's main town to sell the coffee beans they grow or buy rice, they usually put on clothes.

Joseph said he believes that the spirit of Philip comes from Tanna and that one day he will return. On that day the fish will leap from the sea and life will become eternal. "At the very moment that [Philip] sets foot ashore," said anthropologist Kirk Huffman, "mature kava plants will sprout all over the island; all the old people will shed their skins like snakes and become young again; there will be no more sickness and no more death... a man will be able to take any woman he wants." Joseph wasn't worried that Philip may soon die. "The movement will always continue," he says. "And, from my opinion, or from what we believe, the spirit in Prince Philip won't die." *Independent*, 13 Feb 2010; *D.Telegraph*, 1 May 2010, 5 May 2017; *Sunday Telegraph*, 26 April 2015; [AP] 9 June 2015. See also "The last cargo cult" by Mike Jay (*Strange Attractor*, Journal One, 2004) and 'The Philip Worshippers of Tanna' by Matthew Baylis, FT309:74-76.

SIDELINES...

EXCREMENTAL MESSAGE

Every month for almost 20 years, someone in Bath has posted a piece of used lavatory paper to Gary Lineker. After he revealed this on Twitter, fellow BBC broadcaster Jonathan Agnew said he had received the same monthly post for 10 years. Cricket correspondent Agnew dubbed the unknown sender "the Bath bottom-wiper". *Western Daily Press*, 4 Jan 2017.

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

A bride who was jilted by her groom married her dog instead, on 26 November. The female pooch wore a miniature wedding dress. Romina Pitton was unwilling to let her preparations go to waste when her fiancé accused her of infidelity and backed out days before the ceremony in San Lorenzo, Santa Fe province, Argentina. *Metro*, *D.Mirror*, 29 Nov 2016.

MOUSE STITCHED UP

When Cailey Fiesel, 24, wore a new black dress to work in New York on 16 August, she picked up a "disturbingly pungent odour". Later she noticed what she thought was a "loose string" grazing her leg. It turned out to be the leg of a dead rodent, which had been sewn into the hem.

She had purchased the dress, made in Turkey, from a Zara store in Greenwich, Connecticut. She developed a rash diagnosed as a rodent-borne disease. [CNN] 15 Nov; *D.Mail*, 16 Nov 2016.

NEAR MISS

An asteroid called 2014 J025 and nicknamed "The Rock" flew past Earth at 1.24pm on 19 April, at an uncomfortably close distance of just over a million miles. It was discovered three years ago and is thought to be between 2,132ft (650m) and 0.87 miles (1.4km) in length. No asteroid of comparable size has come that close in the past 13 years. "The Rock" will not be close again until 2500. *D.Telegraph*, 20 April 2017.



Down among the dead zones

DAVID HAMBLING faces the horsemen of the probably impending underwater apocalypse

"How long can the Pacific Ocean survive?" demands an Internet news story about continuing flow of radioactive material from the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant. Some 300 tons of radioactive water are leaking into the sea every day, with an estimated 50,000 trillion Becquerels of radiation released so far. Other stories describe areas of seabed covered in dead sea creatures, with expanding 'dead zones' off the West Coast of the US devoid of life. Mainstream news outlets seem content to ignore the story. Is this another wacky fantasy by conspiracy doom-mongers or is there more to it?

In fact, there are two separate phenomena at work here.

Radiation is still leaking from Fukushima, but the important thing to remember is that the Pacific Ocean is big, really big. To use the standard unit of measurement, it is about 30,000 times the size of Wales. It contains a vast quantity of seawater, enough to absorb a lot of radiation without having much effect. An old environmental saying states that 'dilution is the solution to pollution' – any pollutant becomes harmless when sufficiently diluted, and poisons are harmless when the dose is small enough (to everyone except homeopaths).

As numerous analyses have shown, the amount of radiation from Fukushima is large enough to raise radiation well above the background levels even as far away as the US, but not to a hazardous degree. The Baltic, which is tiny by comparison, took the radiation from Chernobyl, and has a much higher concentration. This is hardly a good thing, but has not been catastrophic.

Dead zones, however, are another matter.

'Marine snow' was discovered by Japanese researchers in the 1950s. Taking a submersible to the depths in the Sea of Japan, they found that their searchlight beams caught a steady drift of pale, apparently crystalline snowflakes that they dubbed marine snow. Analysis revealed the snow to be mainly organic material, with airborne dust and calcite from tiny shellfish ballasting it down. It consists largely of faecal pellets and the bodies of marine microorganisms, which aggregate into sticky masses and fall to the ocean floor over the course of a few days.

Early oceanographers could not understand why there was so much life on the seabed in deep waters where there was no sunlight and seemingly no way of sustaining life. But for the creatures that live there, it literally rains food. Marine snow is



An old environmental saying states that 'dilution is the solution to pollution'

man from heaven. The seabed really is littered with the remains of sea creatures.

However, there is a limit. When conditions are right, phytoplankton (algae and plant-like bacteria) blooms on a large scale, turning the sea into green soup. Tiny animals called zooplankton feast on the phytoplankton. The marine snow becomes a blizzard, and as it decays the process takes all the available oxygen from the water.

Normally water circulation replenishes the oxygen supply, but if the sea is stratified into layers, a low-oxygen or hypoxic area may form. The result may be called an Ocean Minimum Zone (OMZ) or just a dead zone, where fish, shellfish, corals and other sea creatures cannot survive. Mobile sea life may get away, but in some cases masses of dead fish are washed up on the shoreline.

Plankton blooms, and the dead zones they produce, are often formed as a result of fertiliser and treated sewage from rivers providing an excess of nutrients. Over 400 dead zones have been identified and mapped; one forms in the Gulf of Mexico every year in late summer (pictured above). The Baltic Sea has several of the world's

largest dead zones.

Not all are man-made. Some major rivers regularly produce dead zones simply from the volume of nutrients they carry into the sea. Others appear when there is unusual flooding, as happened off Carolina in 1999. The entire Black Sea is a naturally occurring dead zone at depths below a few hundred metres, because there are no currents to circulate oxygenated waters.

Dead zones may move after they have formed. These sound like something out of a horror movie: an eddy like a slow whirlpool, up to 90 miles (145km) across, which kills off everything in its path. Several such eddies have been found in the North Atlantic, and scientists have expressed concern that one might reach the Cape Verde islands and wipe out the local marine ecosystem.

Dead zones do not make the newspapers because they have been around for so many years and are tucked away out of sight. However, they are changing. Many are growing, although one of the largest is now getting smaller. This is a dead zone in the eastern Pacific of Central and South America. An analysis of coastal sediments shows that the area without oxygen has been steadily shrinking for over a century, though the reasons for this are not clear.

In general, the causes for the changes in dead zones are not fully understood. Scientists need a better grasp of what they call 'transport', the complex pattern of currents falling and rising from the depths. This process of churning is ultimately driven by the winds, and these in turn vary with larger weather systems. The El Niño and La Niña weather patterns that occur every few years may have a major influence on dead zones.

One of the biggest questions in this area is of course the effect of climate change. The outlook is generally not encouraging; warmer water holds less oxygen and this is likely to mean the expansion of OMZs.

Dead zones are not the only threat to ocean life. The other horsemen of the underwater apocalypse are the slow trend towards acidification, which harms corals and other creatures that form shells from the carbonate in seawaters, and coral bleaching, the mass die-off of algae which live on coral from higher temperatures.

There are certainly reasons to be concerned about the health of the oceans, but Fukushima radiation is not the source of the problem. At least not until giant mutated sea creatures start storming into Tokyo.

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PAUL SIEVEKING surveys recent Egyptian discoveries, including a lost city and a giant statue



KHALED DESOUKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

COLOSSAL STATUE

A 26ft (8m) tall quartzite statue broken into several pieces was unearthed on 7 March 2017 in the working class Matariyyah neighbourhood of northeast Cairo by a German-Egyptian archaeological team. Digging on waterlogged wasteland, they first discovered the chest before locating its jaw, right ear, part of its right

eye, and then eventually its crown. The top of the crown, the height of a child, was so large it had to be packed in mud and lifted out of the ditch with an excavator before it could be cleaned. At first the statue was thought to depict Ramses the Great, the most powerful ruler of ancient Egypt and the inspiration for Shelley's poem *Ozymandias* about the "colossal wreck" of a once-mighty

king. Ramses in Greek transliterates as Ozymandias, and the arrival in London of a large statue of him is believed to have inspired Shelley's 1818 sonnet and its most famous line: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

The upper part of a life-size statue of Seti II, Ramses's grandson, was also discovered at the site. Although much smaller than the other statue, experts said the limestone work showed fine artistic detail. The neighbourhood was built over the site of the ancient city of Heliopolis, a religious centre dedicated to the worship of the sun god Ra. Ramses built a sun temple bearing his own name in the area, which is why the larger statue was thought to depict him.

"The sun god created the world in Heliopolis," said Dietrich Raue, the head of the German team. "That's what I always tell the people here when they ask if there is anything important. According to the pharaonic belief, the world was created in Matariyyah." A few days after the discovery, antiquities minister Khaled el-Anani said the colossus almost certainly depicts Psamtek I, who ruled between 664 and 610 BC. He is credited with bringing stability to Egypt after years of turmoil. *Guardian*, 10 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, 11 Mar; *D.Mail*, 11+17 April 2017.

LOST CITY

An ancient town and necropolis discovered in Egypt's Sohag province dating back to 5316 BC may yield new insights into Abydos, one of the oldest cities in ancient Egypt. Abydos was Egypt's capital towards the end of the predynastic period and during the rule of the first four dynasties. The discovery was made 400m (1,300ft) away from the New Kingdom temple of Seti I, dating from about 1290 BC, when Abydos was a bustling pilgrimage hub, burial place of the first kings and centre of the cult of Osiris, god of the underworld. Archaeologists have so far uncovered 15 huge mud-brick tombs, measuring 46ft (14m) by 49ft (15m), some covered by mastabas, or flat-roofed chapels. These tombs probably held high-ranking officials and grave builders. They were built with side chambers and would have been lavishly furnished. Other finds included huts, pottery vessels and stone tools used in agriculture, which suggested that the homes belonged to workers. The finds showed that there was a vibrant community here in pre-dynastic times. [R] 23 Nov; *IBTimes*, 24 Nov; *Times*, 25 Nov 2016.

TUTANKHAMUN'S GRANNY

Archaeologists working under the umbrella of the German Archaeological Institute have discovered a well-preserved alabaster statue thought to represent Queen Tiye, wife of King Amenhotep III and grandmother of King Tutankhamun. It was found at the Amenhotep III funerary temple in Kom El-Hittan, one of the largest and most impressive in Luxor. The excavators were lifting the lower part of a statue of Amenhotep III when the Queen Tiye statue appeared by its left leg. It is the first alabaster statue of the queen to be unearthed; all previous statues of her unearthed in the temple were carved from quartzite. It shows Tiye wearing the vulture headdress worn by pharaonic queens, as well as the Uræus, the rearing cobra, a symbol of Egypt. Dr Hourig Sourouzian, who led the excavation, says the statue is in very good condition considering its age, and has maintained all of its ancient colours. Tiye is believed to have outlived her husband and to have ruled alongside her son Amenhotep IV (reigned

c.1353-c.1336 BC), who renamed himself Akhenaten as he abandoned traditional Egyptian religion for his monotheistic solar cult. See **FT117:28-31, 122:49**.

Earlier in March, the German archaeological mission at the temple had uncovered dozens of diorite stone statues depicting the lion-headed warrior goddess Sekhmet, probably arranged to protect the temple from danger. The statues show the goddess in both the sitting and standing position, holding a sceptre of the papyrus flower and the symbol of life. *archaeology.org*, 23 Mar; *dailymail.com*, 24 Mar; *Times*, 25 Mar 2017.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

212: OEDIPUS WRECKS

(Titular honours to Woody Allen for his segment of the 1989 film *New York Stories*)

Apart from showing himself capable (Sorry, capable) of inventing fratricide, Cain inaugurated incest, marrying (*Jubilees* 4. 9) sister Awan.

Of course, in the sparsely populated Land of Nod, he hadn't much choice – probably lucky not to end up a sheep-shagger.

Not the only biblical case of keeping it in the family. Albeit from different mothers, Abraham and wife Sarah (Genesis 20.12) were both sired by Terah – Qué Terah Terah...

Brother-sister marriages were standard with the Egyptian Pharaohs. The best-known, King Tut, himself product of an incestuous fling between Akhenaten – fancy playing away when you've got Nefertiti in your boudoir – and a sister, married his own half-sister Ankhesenamun – Tut Tut!

The Ptolemies maintained the tradition, most notably Elizabeth Taylor (er, Cleopatra VII) who married sons Ptolemy 13 & 14, her own ancestry comprising three uncle-niece and three brother-sister unions.

As evidenced by the 270 census returns from Roman Egypt, incestuous marriages continued to be the norm, both brother-sister and father-daughter. A typical horoscope reads: "If a son is born when the Sun is in Mercury he will be brave and tall and will acquire property and moreover will be married to his own sister and have children by her" – Can't imagine seeing that in our newspapers' astrological columns.

Keeping property within the family is one explanation of the practice. Another might be a desire to emulate the Pharaohs of their country's glorious past; cf. Keith Hopkins, *Comparative Studies in History & Society* 22 (1980), 303-54, expanding R Middleton's pioneering study in *American Sociological Review* 27, 1962, 603-11.

The Greeks and Romans were somewhat schizophrenic on the subject. They had no apparent difficulty with Zeus/Jupiter being married to sister Hera/Juno. Homer had his Land of the Phæacians (Odyssey) ruled by married siblings Alcinoo and Arete ('Virtue' – Sister Virtue in *Doctor in the House* is quite another matter). Adonis as the

product of Myrrha being shagged at a party by her dad Cinyras – a case of Beyond the Minge? – caused no obvious concern. But when Canace gave birth to her brother's child, it was flung out to die and she was forced to kill herself with a sword provided by outraged father Aeolus (Hyginus, *Fables*, ch238; Ovid, *Heriodes*, no11 – a shame Euripides's *Aeolus* is lost).

Given his own track record (see below), it's appropriate that Canace was one of Nero's favourite acting roles (Suetonius, *Nero*, ch21 para3) – his fat belly made pregnancy-simulation easy, and all the more so that another was Oedipus.

The Theban king remains as incest's default position, his marital ménage unimprovably summed up in Tom Lehrer's ditty:

"Yes, he loved his mother like no other,

His daughter was his sister and his son was his brother.

One thing on which you can depend is, He sure knew who a boy's best friend is."

Spartan King Leonidas, hero of Thermopylae, was married to niece Gorgo, daughter of his half-brother Cleomenes – an aspect tactfully elided in relevant Hollywood celluloid epics.

Cimon, otherwise a paradigm of clean living, was married to sister Elpinike (Plutarch, *Cimon*, ch4, paras5-7, until he redeemed his reputation by selling her off to a rich suitor.

Virgil (*Aeneid*, bk6 v623) depicts his hero in the Underworld (almost as horrific a place as the Underground) as being shown the prisoners enduring eternal torments in Tartarus, one being pointed out as *Hic thalamum invasit natæ vetitosque hymenæos* – "This one invaded a daughter's room and forbidden union."

The most notorious woman in Virgil's Rome was Clodia, probably (cf. TP Wiseman, *Catullus and his World*, 1983) Catullus's girlfriend Lesbia, sister of the gangster-boss Clodius (Rome's Tony Soprano). Cicero in his funniest speech (*In Defence of Caelius*), alleges an incestuous ménage thus: "Clodia's husband Clodius – Oh, SORRY, always making that mistake!" For good measure, he implies she poisoned her legal hubby, Metellus.

Accusations of incest were flung about in Rome; cf. Tacitus's *Annals*, bk6 ch19, bk12 ch8. Many were doubtless trumped-

up, but their frequency implies Roman credulity.

At the imperial level, Caligula democratically shagged all three sisters (Suetonius, ch24 para1), though the notorious foetus-ripping-eating scene in I, *Claudius* came from some script-writer's over-heated imagination – a defoetused attitude?

Having married and disposed of his second cousin Messalina, Claudius's fourth venture into matrimonial bliss was with his niece Agrippina. This being illegal under Roman law, Claudius cut the legal Gordian knot by changing it. On their nuptial day, Agrippina's maternal second cousin Junius Silanus, falsely accused by her of sibling incest, committed suicide – a welcome wedding present.

Post-Claudius, Agrippina attempted to bind Nero more closely to her apron strings or knicker-elastic. I'll let Suetonius (ch28 para2) tell the tabloid tale: "Whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing." Obvious precursor of Monica Lewinsky's blue dress decorated with globules of presidential spunk. Still, Rome did have a litter problem – street accidents (cf. Juvenal, *Satire* 3) were common – and their sexting was less hazardous than would have been texting.

An imperial edict of AD 295 attempted to restrict Roman incest whilst allowing the Egyptian brand to continue – The Bangles could have made a song out of this. Not the end of the story. Constantine's excuse for executing wife Fausta and son Crispus was that they were having it off. The most notorious Byzantine offender was Heraclius (AD 610-641), whose marriage to niece Martina was punished by God in this ingenious way: "Whenever he urinated, he was obliged to lay a board across his stomach to prevent it spurting in his face" (Nicephorus, *History*, bk7 ch11)

Don't know if Bill Clinton's curved cock (Peyronie's Disease) give him similar problems. But, it justifies half of this prescription attributed to various wits, most probably Thomas Beecham – Arnold Bax the runner-up ahead of Oscar Wilde and (naturally) Stephen Fry: "You should try everything once except incest and folk dancing."



Avian manifestations and messages

ALAN MURDIE adds a further strange twist to the tale of the 'Phantom Bird of Lincoln's Inn'

For the ghost enthusiast, the story of the bird-like footprints appearing in chalk sprinkled on the floor of a set of allegedly haunted rooms at Lincoln's Inn on 11 May 1901 may already seem strange enough [*'A Winged Malevolence'* by Nina Antonia, **FT353:30-33**]. However, I feel compelled to comment further, not on account of my own membership of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, but from the wish to share a further bizarre and little-known aspect of this already extraordinary story.

The 'Phantom Bird of Lincoln's Inn' was certainly a story that impressed writers who were otherwise poles apart in their personal temperament and outlook on life. For example, James Wentworth Day described it as "the most remarkable London ghost, the most terrifying phenomenon I have ever heard of" (*Here Are Ghosts and Witches*, 1954). Day shot thousands of game birds in his time as a hunting-shooting-fishing country sportsman and had no qualms about wringing the neck of a chicken and biting its head off for a wager (*Farming Adventure*, 1943), and so he might well have been perturbed by thought of an avian phantom back from the dead. But equally, strict vegetarian and vocal campaigner against animal cruelty Alasdair Alpin Macgregor similarly declared: "Of all the strange happenings recorded in the archives of haunted London none is stranger, none eerier, none more macabre" (*Phantom Footsteps*, 1959).

For myself the most remarkable aspect is a coincidence that occurred the same night with a message received in an experiment in mediumship 50 miles away in Cambridge. This scarcely known aspect of the 'Winged Malevolence' or 'Bird Elemental' caused the late Maurice Grosse to declare it "an astonishing story". I had drawn it to his attention while discussing the practicalities of using powder and chalk when investigating haunted premises – and Maurice certainly had witnessed some astonishing events over the years.



The message was obtained by Margaret Verrall (1857-1916), a classics lecturer at Newnham College Cambridge, who had taken to privately practising automatic writing. In automatic writing the hand of a person holding a pen – often in a trance or asleep – writes out messages without any conscious control or volition. Margaret Verrall had begun her experiments following the death of Frederic Myers (1843-1901) the poet, classicist and a leading figure in the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882.

On the same Saturday evening journalists Max Pemberton and Ralph Blumenfeld were beginning their vigil at Lincoln's Inn, Margaret Verrall invited a

small party of ladies to dinner at her home at 5 Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge, as her husband was dining out. After her guests departed, she went upstairs and felt driven

to write automatically. She came downstairs again and while sitting in the dark at 11.10pm, her hand began writing words in a mixture of English, Latin and classical Greek. When translated her message read: "This is what I have wanted, at last. Justice and joy speak a word to the wise. A.W.V. and perhaps someone else. Chalk sticking to the feet has got over the difficulty. You help greatly by always persevering. Now I can write a name – thus, here it is!" The rest was unintelligible, but her hand also rapidly drew a crude sketch of a bird.

She inspected the results of this experiment with her husband; they were more amused than perplexed, jokingly referring to the sketch between themselves over the next few days as the "cockyoly bird". Indeed, it would have been dismissed as altogether meaningless but for what Margaret Verrall saw in the *Westminster Gazette* five days later, on the evening of 16 May. This

was an abridged account from the *Daily Mail* of the ghost hunt conducted by Pemberton and Blumenfeld "in rooms a stone's throw from the Law Courts" (i.e. Lincoln's Inn at the back of the High Court on the Strand) over the night of 11-12 May just as she had commenced her experiment.

Margaret Verrall realised she received her curious message and drawing of a striding bird at just after 11.10pm, only an hour and a half before the first door unlatched in the haunted room at Lincoln's Inn and just over three hours before the first manifestation of footprints in the powdered chalk at 2.30am. Three tracks in the left-hand room and five in the right-hand room were noted. The baffled observers considered the marks were identical, exactly 2in (5cm) long – comparable to the footprints of a bird about the size of a turkey with three toes and a short spur behind.

That a medium should have received a message containing such elements simultaneously with the occurrence of a manifestation is virtually unique in the



annals of ghost hunting; at the least a most striking and singular coincidence. On one level Mrs Verrall tried to play down this connection between the events; she may have seen it as mildly undignified to find her private messages as an automatist linked with the sensational Fleet Street story of what later became known as "The Bird Elemental", emphasising: "The question of a connexion between the story and the script is not affected by the value of the story". But she considered: "A drawing of a bird with a leer is a singularly appropriate comment on the story in the *Daily Mail*."

She did not think that telepathy could explain it since "the statement delivered by way of automatic writing was received some three hours before the manifestation, and its publication by a still longer period." Whilst acknowledging "It is true that the sprinkling of the chalk probably preceded the writing", she added: "There is no reason to think that the writer of the tale had any expectation as to the sort of marks he might find in the chalk; nor did they expect to encounter a bird."

"The script was obtained on May 11th, and whether or not a bird made marks in the chalk in the early hours of May 12th, it is certain that a story to that effect was printed on May 13th, and brought to my knowledge on May 16th."

More deeply, Mrs Verrall acknowledged that the story crystallised the meaning of the enigmatic words: "In this case the absurd element in the script and the quaintness of the phrase about the chalk sticking to the feet drew special attention to the writing, and it was discussed by us more than once. The word *calx* is ambiguous; it might mean 'heel' as well as 'chalk', and it was not till we saw the story in the *Westminster Gazette* of May 16th that we found an interpretation for the Latin words.

"At the time when this script was obtained I had no reason to attach any



Her hand began writing words in a mixture of English, Latin and classical Greek

particular value to my automatic writing, and no steps were taken to obtain external corroboration of the dates of the script except entries in my Diary and script-book and communication of the writing at the first opportunity to my husband." (In *Proceedings of the SPR* (1906), vol.20 chap. XIII, 328-331)

This coincidence has gone virtually unnoticed by most commentators, recorded briefly as a postscript by John Canning at the end of his chapter on the Lincoln's Inn ghost in *50 Great Ghost Stories* (1971),

where he describes it as "a tail piece... one little and curious coincidence" and as "a minor demonstration of precognition". The reader would thus be left unaware of its place in a much greater set of mediumistic communications produced by Margaret Verrall and a number of other leading mediums in the early 20th century, spreading over many years.

Between 5 March 1901 and 31 December 1904 Mrs Verrall produced 322 pieces of automatic writing, a number of which she believed contained prophetic material. Describing her technique she stated: "I usually write when I am alone, and I prefer not to have a bright light; it is desirable also to write at a time of day or under circumstances when I am not likely to be interrupted. But none of these conditions is essential. I write freely with my husband in the room; I have also written with my daughter watching me, and with a servant moving about in the room; on five occasions (July 30, 1901, Dec. 9, 1902, April 26, 1903, May 11 and 13, 1904) I have tried to obtain writing in presence of other friends, each time with success, though the amount has been less than usual; it is quite common for me to write in a railway carriage with other travellers present; and it has happened to me several times to be momentarily interrupted, to answer a question briefly, and to continue writing."

Mrs Verrall was one of seven mediums whose scripts began to accumulate at the offices of the Society for Psychical Research, leading its secretary Alice Johnson to consider that they represented a scheme of communication devised by the discarnate Frederic Myers, using multiple and widely separated mediums (or perhaps 'media' in this context). Each individual medium received a fragment that made no sense in isolation but when combined with all the others began to take on a coherent meaning, leading the messages to be known as the 'cross-correspondences'. Widely separated, variously being in the United States, Great Britain and India, the automatists routinely had no idea of the ultimate meaning of the messages they channelled, never having heard – at least consciously – of the numerous obscure references that appeared. These many obscure literary and classical allusions, together with the philological elements, go far beyond what the patience and, indeed, the comprehension of what any vulgar critic or opponent of spiritualism can deal with, so consequently there have never been any accusations of chicanery lodged against the mediums concerned.

The cross-correspondences have periodically been offered as providing the best evidence of survival of human



TOP: Margaret Verrall. ABOVE: The automatic drawing of a bird she produced on 11 May 1901.



GHOSTWATCH

personality after death, since it is hard to envisage a 'super-ESP' power between all automatists working to produce the results over so many years. Unfortunately, the sheer complexity of the scripts meant they failed as a proof of survival, being too complicated for all but the most dedicated scholars to penetrate. It has not been until the 21st century that a full review has been undertaken, aided by computer. (Trevor Hamilton 'Assessing the Assessors: the Cross-Correspondences – Automatic Writings Then and Now' paper to the Conference of the SPR, Sept 2016).

Equally, no incident better illustrates the sundering gulf that exists between the popular ghost story relayed by the fireside or on the screen and the work of psychical researchers both then and now. It is hard to credit that Professor Hornell Hart's 'Six theories of Apparitions' (*Proc. of the SPR* vol.50, 153-239, 1956) appeared in the same century rather than within just two years of Elliot O'Donnell's *Trees of Ghostly Dread* (1958) at the same time the story of the Phantom Bird of Lincoln's Inn was being revived.

A HAUNTING ON THE STREET

'Pat Phoenix has risen from the ashes' was a sub-heading to 'Exorcist called in to Corrie haunting' in the *Daily Star* of 20 April, reporting that a Roman Catholic priest had been summoned to drive out a ghost from the former Granada TV set of *Coronation Street* in Manchester. Such was the prominence given to this story that Parliament's vote to launch a British General Election was relegated to a minor column. To younger and overseas readers, mention of a 'Pat Phoenix' might seem to continue the fantastic bird theme in this



ABOVE: The former *Coronation Street* set at Granada Studios, said to be plagued by polt activity.
BELOW: Pat Phoenix, one-time star of the long-running soap and focus of the latest 'haunting'.

column, but Pat Phoenix was a British actress who starred in the still-enduring soap opera between 1960-1973 and 1976-1984. Although the actress died of lung cancer aged 62 in 1986, it was no bar to the *Daily Star* airing her possible post-mortem return as the cause of mysterious 'banging noises' and 'exploding equipment' that prompted a band of musicians to threaten to withdraw from a music festival being planned at the former set. TV boss Christopher Wandsworth requested the exorcism to quell fears of soap stars who had been 'freaked out' by what were dubbed 'poltergeist attacks' and concerns that the festival might be put in jeopardy.

Rumours of a haunting at the site have been a tabloid favourite for years, leading the TV show *Most Haunted* to inflict itself upon it for a broadcast in 2005. In 2014, a guide reported seeing "a child and a woman dressed in Victorian clothes" and a woman who appeared to "float before disappearing into thin air". Vague stories surfaced again in June 2015, but seemed largely limited to some unfortunate accidents and unexpected illness amongst cast and crew. *Psychic News* recalled that Tony Warren, the creator of the show who died in March 2016, was "utterly convinced" the set was haunted, and the *Daily Mail* quoted claims before his death that Pat Phoenix had returned to him as a ghost. "After Pat [Phoenix] died, one of my dogs – who would always go bananas when Pat came to the house – suddenly started to behave as if she was there again. I would smell this great gale of perfume".

However, this was Warren's own house, not the Manchester set at 'Granadaland'. Notably, Warren had long before claimed that his previous home was haunted. In April 1961, and within six months of *Coronation Street* first being transmitted, Tony Warren told the long defunct *Daily Sketch* newspaper that his country cottage at Little Hayfield, Derbyshire, was haunted by a male ghost he had seen three times. "I awoke one morning and he was sitting in the rocking chair near the fire. He seemed to be looking at old sketches on the wall. He just melted away..." The same report also states that Pat Phoenix claimed that she was once present in another room in the house with a big fire when it suddenly went very cold and "something" brushed past her. (*Daily Sketch*, 18 April 1961).



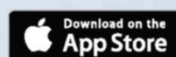
LISTEN

IT JUST MIGHT CHANGE YOUR LIFE



 **UCB**PLAYER

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CANINE SAVIOURS

More tales of dogged devotion, including a psychic cockapoo and some pooches with an impressive knowledge of first aid



MCCLAREN HOSPITAL

ABOVE: Bob recovers in hospital with five-year-old golden retriever Kelsey, who kept him warm and awake for 20 hours.

• Judy Owen, 60, was driving in February 2013 when her four-year-old cockapoo Daisy started howling. “Minutes later,” said Ms Owen, “a man drove into the back of me and sent my car flying into a wall. No one was hurt, but it could have been worse if I hadn’t slowed down to calm Daisy.” The next example of Daisy’s apparent sixth sense occurred in Ms Owen’s flat in Worcester the following October. “Daisy suddenly began rushing around at 4am,” she said. “She jumped on my bed and lay pressing against me. She wouldn’t let me go, she just wanted to stay there. Two hours later the shower door in my bathroom exploded and sent glass everywhere. If I had been in the shower I would have been badly injured. Daisy sensed something and wanted to protect me. She’s normally placid, so I now strongly believe in her psychic powers.” The dog would also bark when the phone was about to ring. *D.Express*, *MX News* (Sydney), 12 Nov 2013.

“She kept barking for help but never left my side,” said Bob

• A man who broke his neck outdoors survived lying in snow for 20 hours thanks to his dog. The man, named only as Bob, was alone when he left his Michigan farmhouse on New Year’s Eve to get firewood, slipped and broke his neck. His five-year-old golden retriever Kelsey kept him warm and awake by lying on him and licking his face. “She kept barking for help but never left my side,” said Bob. A neighbour found him and dialled 911. At the time of the report, Bob had recovered from the paralysis caused by the fracture. *Queensland Times*, 17 Jan 2017.

• A three-year-old boy whose mother was too drunk to look after him survived by suckling milk from a pregnant bitch. The naked child was spotted on 3 September 2015 by neighbour Lauri Escudera, suckling at the teat of her dog Reina (Queen) in a junkyard full of wrecked cars in the desert port city of Arica in Chile. She called police who took the child to hospital, where he was found to be suffering from mild malnutrition, a skin infection and lice. He was passed into the care of a child welfare organisation. His mother, a 40-year-old Peruvian woman called Zulema Reyes, later arrived on the scene drunk, but couldn’t be arrested, as there was no “physical” harm to the boy. She said she had been drinking for two days in honour of the Andean mountain goddess Pachamama. She instead the ritual drinking was a Peruvian tradition. *Sunday Sun*, (Queensland) *Sunday Mail*, 6 Sept; *Times*, 9 Sept 2015. For

children raised by dogs, see FT45:44, 80:8, 150:9, 161:20-21, 185:8-9, 189:9, 252:17, 275:12, 289:20.

• A heroic dog saved a wedding party from a suicide bomber after fighting with a teenager until she blew herself up. The young terrorist was attempting to infiltrate the wedding crowd when the dog arrived to save the day. The interception made the girl detonate the bomb while it was strapped around her body. The blast killed both bomber and dog, Victor Isuku, a police spokesman in Borno, confirmed to local media. The incident occurred a few hours after the killing of three suicide bombers in two foiled attacks by Boko Haram (West Africa’s Daesh equivalent) in nearby towns. *mirror.co.uk*, 5 April 2017.

• When Lesley Hailwood began choking on chocolate, her dog Nell, a 17-month-old German shepherd-retriever cross, jumped on the sofa and pounced on her chest, dislodging the offending choc. “There’s no doubt in my eyes that Nell saved my life,” said the IT worker. “She’s never jumped up on me like that before. She knew I was in trouble and knew exactly how to wind me.” Lesley cares for guide dogs at her home in Liverpool as they are being trained. *D.Mirror*, 14 Jan 2014.

• Bernadetta Henry, a grandmother in her 70s from Llangollen, Denbighshire, North Wales, suffered from sleep apnoea, which could cause her to stop breathing several times every night, but her trusty pooch Boris listened out for her. “If it wasn’t for him I would be dead,” said Ms Henry. “Boris sleeps next to me and can just tell when I stop breathing. As soon as I stop he comes up to my chest and puts his paws on me.” Ms Henry became almost completely deaf following a blood clot in 1982 and had Boris, a bichon frise, as her hearing dog. She was given warfarin to ease the clot but suffered an allergic reaction that caused a brain haemorrhage. “I was told



ABOVE: Lesley Hailwood and Nell, who saved her owner from choking.

I would never move again after the hæmorrhage but my children helped me," she said. She underwent physiotherapy to help her movement but she needed a wheelchair thereafter. She was left with no feeling in her body but retained her sense of taste and smell. Since the death of her husband John five years earlier, she depended more on Boris and relied on him to alert her when the telephone or doorbell rang. *Cascade News*, 24 Nov 2009.

• Beauty therapist Joanna Mellor's five-year-old pet Labrador Leo sensed she had 'died' in her sleep at 4.30am, and his barking awoke her boyfriend Andrew Rayment, in bed beside her in Ilkeston, Derbyshire. He rang for an ambulance and fought to get Ms Mellor, 24, breathing again with chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth. When paramedics arrived she was hooked up to a defibrillator and rushed to hospital, where a faint pulse was eventually detected. Medics reckoned she was "technically dead" for half an hour, but she made a full recovery. She was subsequently found to suffer from Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, which causes the heart to go into overdrive – and in severe cases to stop. *Sun*, 10 Mar 2015.

• German shepherd dog Storm saved the life of Donna Jeffrey, 31, by waking her up when she was struggling to breathe

during an asthma attack. Storm persistently tapped her with his paws on the chest, and Mrs Jeffrey managed to use her inhaler in time. "If I had woken up during a full-blown attack, with a blue face, I would not have been able to phone for an ambulance," said the former nurse from King's Lynn, Norfolk. *Metro*, 21 Jan 2016.

• A pug called Olive ran off from her 16-year-old owner Saffron Mackeson on 4 November after being spooked by fireworks in Wick, a village in South Gloucestershire. Fears for the pint-sized pooch grew as more than a week passed. Ten days later, Nicola Jones, 48, took Bear, her 110lb (50kg) Rottweiler, for a walk when he began sniffing the air beside a hedge. "He wouldn't move," said Ms Jones. "I went through the hedge and found a [5ft/1.5m deep] well and there was Olive, just looking up. I climbed down and pulled her out. I was worried she might have hurt herself, she was petrified, but then her tail wagged. She was fine." She then alerted Olive's owner on the lost-and-found Bristol page on Facebook. Bear isn't the first Rottweiler to come to the rescue. In 2015, a shivering pensioner who was stuck in a field for more than 15 hours was saved by a family of four Rottweilers in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 16 Nov 2016. For other rescues by dogs, see FT199:22, 244:26-27, 330:6, 353:8-9.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

212: SPOUTING WHALES



The myth

When whales surface, they spout a fountain of water out of their blowholes. Ahoy!

The "truth"

They can't do, of course, when you stop to think about it: whales are air-breathing creatures. If their lungs were full of water, they would drown. The blowhole on top of a whale's bonce is similar in function to a nostril: it's used for inhaling and

exhaling. Whales breathe only when they surface; they can't breathe underwater. Since they spend quite a lot of time submerged, this means that they don't breathe as often as, for instance, humans or horses. So when they do breathe, they really go for it – a near total and energetic emptying of their huge lungs, followed by a near-total refilling. It's air that comes out of the blowhole, not water, and it's expelled with sufficient force to travel many feet upwards. Because the air from their lungs is generally warmer than the air just above the sea, it creates visible condensation. And that's what you're looking at when you see a whale spout: a behemothian sigh of hot, stale breath. (Plus, obviously, one of nature's most glorious and uplifting sights.)

Sources

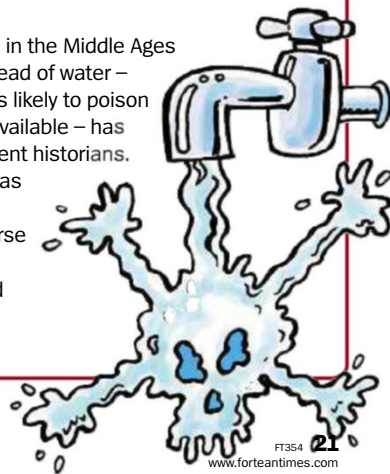
<http://nmlc.org/2009/04/what-is-a-whales-spout/>; <http://whalesbermuda.com/all-about-humpbacks/faq/31-faqs/199-how-does-a-whale-use-its-blowhole>; <https://www.afsc.noaa.gov/hmmil/education/cetaceans/cetaceabeh.php#spouting%20or%20blowing>

Disclaimer

Right now you're thinking "Yeah, but what about if they sometimes exhale from just below the surface of the sea?" And I'm thinking: if anything in this column is wrong or incomplete, please spout off about it in the letters pages.

Mythchaser

The once-popular idea that people in the Middle Ages routinely drank wine and beer instead of water – because alcoholic drinks were less likely to poison you than the unclean water then available – has often been debunked by more recent historians. But a reader wants to know this: has there ever been a time, anywhere, when a society as a matter of course shunned water in favour of some other drink, because they believed water to be dangerous?



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The latest updates on fortean stories, from Canada's murderous 'Wendigo' to Kent's 'killer clowns'...

PASSENGER TURNS 'WENDIGO' [FT241:4-5]



A man with schizophrenia who beheaded a fellow bus passenger in Canada on 30 July 2008 has been

released. Will Baker, formerly known as Vincent Weiguang Li, killed 22-year-old Tim McLean after hearing what he thought was the voice of God. "The voice told me that I was the third story of the Bible, that I was like the second coming of Jesus [and that] I was to save people from a space alien attack." Baker was deemed not criminally responsible and spent seven years in treatment in a secure wing of a psychiatric hospital. Last year, he was allowed to live in his own apartment in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but was still subject to monitoring to ensure he took his medication. A review board in Manitoba has now ordered his discharge – without monitoring – saying he did not pose a significant threat. He said he was "really sorry" for what he had done.

The attack took place in front of horrified passengers as the inter-city Greyhound bus travelled past Portage la Prairie, about 70km (40 miles) west of Winnipeg. Baker, a 40-year-old former church custodian and computer programmer who emigrated from China to Canada in 2001, repeatedly stabbed McLean, who was sitting next to him, before cutting off his head, removing internal organs, and putting his nose, an ear, and part of his mouth in his pocket, inside a plastic bag. The attack began without warning. Alerted by screams from the victim, the driver stopped the bus and fled with the passengers as Baker continued his attack. Ten days earlier, Baker had read an article about the Wendigo, a terrifying hairy biped in native mythology with a ravenous appetite for human flesh. The belief was that it could take possession of people and turn them into cannibalistic monsters. So was Baker simply crazy, or "turning Wendigo"? Or is it impossible



for such a Native American culture-bound disorder to possess a Chinese person? *BBC News, 11 Feb 2017.*

CHEATING THE REAPER [FT346:19]



Emma Martina Luigia Morano, recognised as the world's oldest person since Susannah

Jones passed away in New York in May last year, died on 15 April 2017 at the age of 117 years, 137 days, and 16 hours. She was probably the oldest Italian person who ever lived, but more than five years behind the world champion, Jeanne Calment (122 years and 164 days). Her life spanned three centuries, two world wars, 10 popes and over 90 Italian governments.

She was born in the village of Civiasco in Piedmont, northern Italy, on 29 November 1899, the year in which Marconi first transmitted a radio signal across the English Channel. She outlived her five sisters and three brothers, and was the world's last living link to the 19th century... well, maybe. She worked in a factory making jute sacks and then as a cook in a boarding school. In 1938, shortly

after the death of her only child at the age of seven months, she drove her violent husband out of the house, a courageous act in Fascist Italy. She remained single for the rest of her life.

A party and concert celebrating her 117th birthday last year, organized by Verbania, the town where she lived on the shores of Lake Maggiore, were broadcast live across Italy. She claimed the secret of her longevity was eating three eggs a day, two of them raw, and a little raw minced meat. She maintained this regime ever since a doctor advised her that it would be good for her health when she was diagnosed with anaemia at the age of 20. When she still had teeth, she was fond of chicken and lean raw steak. She long eschewed vegetables and her consumption of fruit was limited to the occasional bunch of grapes. A non-smoker, she drank a daily glass of homemade grappa. According to the US-based Gerontology Research Group (GRG), the world's oldest registered human is now Jamaican Violet Brown, who was born on 10 March 1900. *Guardian, 30 Nov 2016; BBC News, 16 April; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 17 April; NY Times (Int. edition), 25 April 2017.*

CARRY ON CLOWNING [FT346:8-9, 347:28-35, 348:20]



• An axe-wielding "killer clown" prankster has been jailed after he chased a pregnant woman the night

before Hallowe'en last year. Michael March, 18, is thought to be the first person jailed in the UK after the craze swept the country last autumn. Newcastle Crown Court heard he terrified a couple walking past him after banging the foot-long axe on the ground in a pub car park in Sea Road, South Shields, just after 9pm. The woman, who was 22 weeks pregnant, threw a brick at him in an attempt to defend herself before he ran off. After police were called they traced him via CCTV and found him with the axe and a clown mask in his backpack. He said he had himself been chased by killer clowns in Gateshead and thought he would scare people as part of a prank. It cost him dear: six months in nick, even though he had no previous convictions.

Kent police dealt with 59 clown-related incidents between 7 and 10 October. Thames Valley Police had 14 reports in 24 hours, and South Yorkshire Police received 61 reports. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, (Dundee) Courier and Advertiser, 9 Feb 2017.*

• On 25 February, children were playing hide-and-seek in the woods near Lauder Street in a suburb of Pittsburgh when two men dressed as scary clowns "seemed to come out of nowhere". Eight-year-old Dylan Milkowski, of West Mifflin, said: "They were chasing us. They had clown outfits on. They had clown masks. They had pipes and they had shotguns." Dylan called his father Michael, who saw the two men running away up a hillside towards a slagheap. According to Mr Milkowski, one of the men was carrying a shotgun and the other a pipe. He called 911 and police combed the area for two hours, but there was no sign of the men. *pittsburgh.cbslocal.com, 4 Mar 2017.*



KARL SHUKER faces fake news about a giant worm and has doubts about a crypto-hoax



WORMING OUT THE TRUTH

During April 2017, the international media were replete with accounts of varying accuracy regarding a remarkable marine creature known as the giant shipworm *Kuphus polythalamia*, featuring a specimen photographed out of its calcareous tusk-shaped tube and resembling a very long, thick, muscular cylinder of shiny black rubber. The four most frequent claims made in relation to this native of the western Pacific and eastern Indian Oceans were that despite its name it was a mollusc rather than a worm, that it was the world's longest living species of bivalve mollusc, that it was a newly discovered species, and that this particular photographed specimen was the first living one ever seen. Whereas despite its vermiform outward appearance it is indeed a bivalve mollusc, and at up to 5ft (1.5m) long is truly the world's longest bivalve species, the remaining two claims are another matter entirely. Far from being a new species, the giant shipworm was first documented and named scientifically as long ago as 1758, and by no less an authority than Linnæus himself, who devised the binomial system of zoological nomenclature and classification. True, he was initially fooled by its external morphology into assuming that it was a worm, but this error was swiftly rectified. As for the specimen in the April 2017 media reports being the first living one ever seen, this can soon be disproved by online surfing, which will uncover a number of videos and articles demonstrating otherwise. For instance: a much-watched YouTube video uploaded on 13 February 2010, consisting of a television show broadcast in the Philippines and presented by award-winning Filipino journalist Jessica Soho, reveals that the giant shipworm is actually well known in this country, is eaten there as a delicacy, and is



referred to locally as the tamilok, with several shots of villagers holding up some lengthy specimens removed from their shells. So although this sizeable species is undeniably eye-catching, it is certainly not a new form in any sense. However, as documented for the first time by a team of marine biologists whose recent authoritative *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* paper inadvertently inspired these media-inflated claims, the giant shipworm is still interesting for its reliance on symbiotic bacteria in its gills to harness hydrogen sulphide as an energy source for converting carbon dioxide into nutrients. www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/17/bizarre-bivalve-first-living-giant-shipworm-discovered-in-philippines; cosmosmagazine.com/biology/bizarre-new-species-of-giant-shipworm-found-in-the-philippines; www.pnas.org/content/early/2017/04/13/1620470114.

A CARDBOARD CRYPTID?

One of cryptozoology's most iconic images is the Ozenkadnook Tiger photograph – depicting a large, seemingly dark-bodied, white-striped Australian mystery beast supposedly snapped in black and white during the mid-1960s by Melbourne-based Rilla Martin while holidaying in Victoria. In typical cryptozoological tradition, the photo's depiction of the beast is far from clear;

LEFT: Removing the giant shipworm from its calcareous tube. BELOW: The famous photo of the Ozenkadnook Tiger.

but as its burly head looks somewhat dog-like, it has inspired various Aussie cryptid enthusiasts to speculate that the striped creature may be a living mainland thylacine (even though this externally wolf-like marsupial officially died out here over 3,000 years ago, long before its official extinction on Tasmania in 1936). However, its bizarre reverse-striping pattern has led others to suggest that these markings are merely reflected sunlight. The controversy as to what Martin's photo depicts has rumbled on for 50 years, but in a recent newspaper article a remarkable new allegation was made: that the beast was nothing more than a large cardboard cut-out, created, painted with stripes, and photographed in the bush by the father of one Bill Leak – a recently-deceased newspaper cartoonist – with a friend. Bill's father was apparently well known for his love of practical jokes, and the allegation was made by 'Jack the Insider' (aka columnist Peter Hoysted) in *The Australian*, who had known Bill and had included this claim as part of a memorial article about him. The hoax was supposedly staged and the photo snapped as a joke for friends, but allegedly the photo somehow reached the media and soon attracted global attention, at which point Leak Snr became nervous that the truth would be exposed, so he destroyed the cut-out and told his son never to speak to anyone about it – but clearly he did, at least after his father's death, hence Hoysted's account following Bill's own death. Various subsequent reports have seized upon this "confession by proxy" as proof that the Ozenkadnook Tiger photo is a hoax lacking any cryptozoological significance. However, such an attitude overlooks two glaring and decidedly worrying shortcomings concerning this recent revelation. Firstly, it is entirely anecdotal (and not even first-hand), as there seems to be no physical, tangible evidence. Secondly, it signally fails to include any mention of Rilla Martin, the person who for the past five decades has been directly associated with the snapping of this photo, and who has even been interviewed about it by the media. Consequently, until – if ever – these two fundamental flaws can be resolved, I for one shall continue to consider this latest allegation as unproven. www.theaustralian.com.au, 24 Mar 2017.

NECROLOG

This month, we salute an inspirational female astronomer and bid a fond farewell to the hippie mathematician who devised the hardest logic puzzle of all time...



VERA RUBIN

According to the *New York Times*, Vera Rubin “helped usher in a Copernican-scale change in cosmic consciousness, namely the realization that what astronomers always saw and thought was the universe is just the visible tip of a lumbering iceberg of mystery”.

Following a master’s degree at Cornell in 1951, Rubin completed a doctorate at Georgetown University in 1954, where she studied the motion of galaxies. Edwin Hubble had discovered that galaxies are on the average rushing apart from one another, the key to the theory that the observable Universe is the result of a Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago. Rubin’s thesis in 1954 stated that galaxies are not distributed uniformly throughout the Universe but tend to cluster and rotate around one another.

In the outer regions of the Solar System, far away from the Sun where the force of its

gravity is more feeble than hereabouts, planets move more slowly than the Earth. Were Uranus to move as fast as us, it would escape from the Solar System entirely, its centrifugal thrust too large for the weakened inwards gravitational pull from the Sun. This has been understood since Newton, and is a cornerstone of Einstein’s general relativity: bodies orbiting a central mass will have speeds that fall in proportion to the square root of their distance from the centre.

Many galaxies of stars form spirals, where relatively few stars in the outer arms orbit around a dense mass of stars at the centre. Here too, the laws of gravity imply that the outer stars should move relatively slowly compared to those nearer the central mass. But when, in the 1970s and early 1980s, Rubin mapped the motion of stars in spiral galaxies, she discovered that, far from slowing with distance from the centre, they moved

at similar speeds, or even travelled faster the further out they were. Her results implied that the galaxies are rotating so fast that they should fly apart. Either Newton’s law of gravitational attraction, and by implication Einstein’s general relativity, form an incomplete description on cosmic scales – which would be truly revolutionary – or there are vast volumes of unseen matter that provide additional gravitational grip on the stars. This unseen stuff has become known as dark matter – dark in that it does not shine in the electromagnetic spectrum at any wavelength. Rubin’s discovery seemingly implies that matter, as we know it, consisting of atomic electrons, protons and neutrons, is but flotsam on a vast sea of dark matter. Current estimates are that dark matter outweighs our stuff by a factor of five to 10. So, following Rubin’s breakthrough, we now believe that we are not even made of the same stuff as most of creation.

During recent years Rubin became a popular favourite for a Nobel prize, but never received the accolade. Having battled sex discrimination throughout her career, she became an inspiration for women in science. Among many honours, she was a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, won the gold medal of the Royal Astronomical Society – the first woman to have done so since Caroline Herschel in 1828 – and asteroid 5726 Rubin was named after her. She received several honorary doctorates, including one from Princeton University half a century after having been barred from their graduate programme.

Vera Florence Rubin (née Cooper), astronomer, born Philadelphia PA 23 July 1928; died Princeton NJ 25 Dec 2016, aged 88.



RAYMOND SMULLYAN

Ray Smullyan was a magician, concert pianist, hippie and Taoist; he was also an accomplished logician, mathematician and professor of philosophy at Indiana University credited by the logician George Boolos as the originator of the “hardest logic puzzle ever”.

The puzzle goes as follows: Three gods A, B, and C are called, in no particular order, True, False, and Random. True always speaks truly, False always speaks falsely, but whether Random speaks truly or falsely is a random matter. Your task is to determine the identities of A, B, and C by asking three yes-no questions; each question must be put to exactly one god, though you can ask the same god more than one question. The gods understand English, but will answer all questions in their own language, in which the words for yes and no are “da” and “ja”, though you don’t know which is which. The puzzle was solved by Boolos in a paper shortly before his death in 1996. Various accounts of how to approach it may be found online.

Smullyan worked his way through the University of Chicago performing magic tricks at nightclubs and parties and was good enough to consider becoming a full-time magician or a

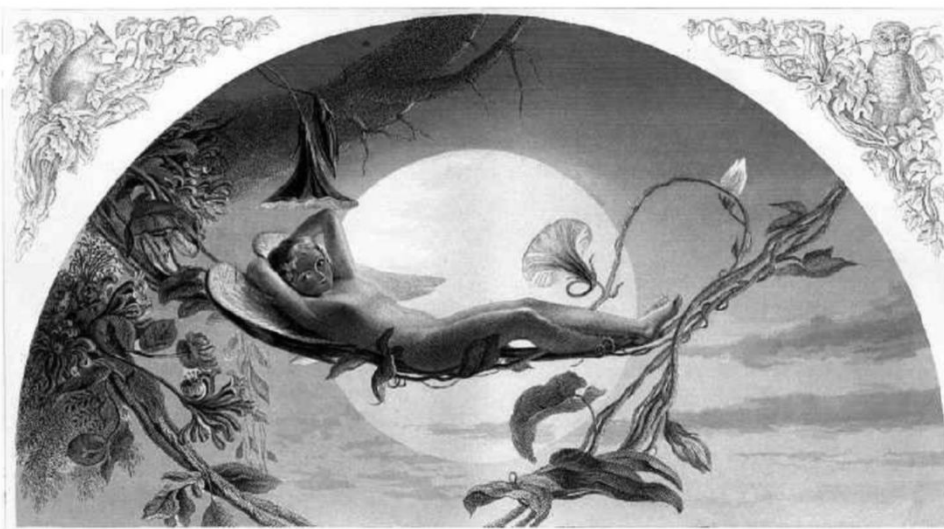


concert pianist. In 1957, however, while studying for a PhD at Princeton, he published a paper in the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* on the Austrian-born logician and mathematician Kurt Gödel, whose eponymous “Incompleteness Theorem”, published in 1931, planted a bomb under the world of mathematics and philosophy by showing that the assumption that all questions in mathematics could in theory be definitively answered using mathematical proof did not hold true.

Smullyan’s paper, showing that Gödel’s theorem held for mathematical systems considerably simpler than those Gödel quoted, had an influence on contemporary understanding of Gödel, and he would continue to explore the Gödelian universe in numerous books of recreational mathematics and logic, including *Forever Undecided: A Puzzle Guide to Gödel*, a collection of brainteasers based upon Gödel’s mathematical speculations. Smullyan later made a compelling case that much of the fascination with Gödel’s theorem should be directed at Tarski’s theorem, which is much easier to prove and equally disturbing philosophically.

In 2004 Smullyan released a CD of his own performances of favourite classical piano pieces. He also published an autobiography, *Some Interesting Memories: A Paradoxical Life*, and several books on Taoism. When asked why he didn’t believe in astrology, he replied that he was a Gemini, and Geminis never believe in astrology. Another of his philosophical, if silly, sayings, was: “Why should I worry about dying? It’s not going to happen in my lifetime!”

Raymond Merrill Smullyan, philosopher and mathematician, born Far Rockaway, NY 25 May 1919; died Hudson NY 6 Feb 2017, aged 97.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

INVISIBLE PRESENCES

In November 1911, Walter Yeeling Evans Wentz, an American scholar who had studied at Oxford, published one of the great works of 20th-century folklore and forteana: *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*. The book is chock-full of accounts from fairy believers in Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales. Now, Evans Wentz himself was a fairy believer – but was he also a fairy seer? Well, he certainly *wanted* to meet fairies. There is, for example, a remarkable description of Walter and his Gaelic-speaking guide Michael on the heights of Barra, in the Hebrides, in 1908, waiting forlornly for a rock fairy door to swing open and reveal the people of the hollow hills. However, in *The Fairy Faith*, Evans Wentz is, otherwise, rather elusive about his own experiences. In the past few days, I’ve happily come across two forgotten pieces of fairy writing by or concerning Evans Wentz from 1912, that might shed some light on his own encounters (or lack thereof).

The first is an interview in the *Pall Mall Gazette* where Evans Wentz is asked whether he had ever seen a fairy. The American admitted that he had not but claimed: “I have commonly felt many strange psychical impressions when in places supposed to be possessed by [the fairies].” In an article, published almost simultaneously by the *London Daily News*,

Evans Wentz writes: “I have wandered with [the Celts] into strange places where the fairies are said to dwell, and I am now obliged [curious expression?] to admit that when in those places *I have felt invisible presences all round about me* [my italics]. Other persons... have had the same mysterious feeling in the same places, and the few, who are gifted with seership, have on rare occasions while there beheld beautiful

tall beings, radiant and glorious, with auras of brilliant colours than any colours known to men.” This seems a rather long and highfalutin way of saying, “No, I haven’t seen a fairy”.

Evans Wentz, who dedicated his whole life to studying the spiritual world, does return, though, to this idea of ‘feeling’ presences. What does he mean? I’d be tempted to recall his references to “magnetic forces” in *The Fairy Faith* and those who are “susceptible to such things”. He was convinced that certain locations, including Carnac (a place to which he felt a personal connection) and the

Isle of Man were junctures for these magnetic forces, and speculated that fairy paths might actually be “magnetic arteries”. Evans Wentz was, I suspect, very clear in his mind what these magnetic forces were, but never really explains the ‘science’ (if that is the right word) behind them: though there is, of course, a great hinterland of 19th-century writers on ‘magnetism’.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

“I HAVE
WANDERED INTO
PLACES WHERE
THE FAIRIES
ARE SAID TO
DWELL AND HAVE
FELT INVISIBLE
PRESENCES”



Nothing to do with Islam...

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

Some people will believe anything – not exactly an original thought, I know. It's usually more interesting to poke a sharp stick at the people who generate the stuff that some people believe, and see what comes out from under the stone.

On 13 April 2017, the US Air Force had the pleasure of using its GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb in earnest for the first time, against Daesh militants lurking in caves and tunnels in Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan. A bit lighter than Barnes Wallace's 22,000lb (10-tonne) Grand Slam bomb deployed late in World War II, but carrying more explosive, the 'Mother of All Bombs' disposed of 96 Daesh terrorists. How much of the cave/tunnel complex was destroyed isn't known at the time of writing. Not that it matters, because that's all just a cover story according to Michael Sallas, PhD, a star of the UFO Disclosure movement.

On the Exopolitics.org website Dr Sallas reported that: "Insider testimony suggests another reason for the use of the MOAB bomb. The undisclosed goal is to flush out, capture or destroy giants hiding in Afghanistan's ancient cavern system who possess technological secrets going back to the origins of human civilization." No, really. "Secret space program whistleblower, Corey Goode, was among the first to publicly disclose the existence of 'stasis chambers' that have been holding perfectly preserved giants for millennia," we learn. Goode is also, by the way, insistent that the Nazis have been on the Moon since the 1930s. Other 'whistleblowers' have reported that an "elite US Special Forces" team was almost wiped out by a 12ft-tall giant in Afghanistan. Poor old SF, they always get it in the neck in these legendary events, don't they – remember the Dulce Wars? Dr Sallas reminds us that according to Deuteronomy, "the descendants of Moab destroyed the giants in the land that the Moabites wanted to settle. Now, the Pentagon just used a bomb called MOAB, allegedly to destroy giants hiding in Afghanistan's cavern system," and adds: "*This does not appear to be a mere coincidence.*" Well, who'd ever have thought otherwise?

Having got over the giggles, I tend to file this kind of stuff (and there is more where it came from) under the general heading



LEFT: Smoke rises after a US air strike on IS positions in Nangarhar province. BELOW: A US MOAB bomb.

hegemonic power structures and ideological Capitalism." There's a thought for you. And, "much of UFO discourse contains deep seeded anti-establishment and anti-capitalist ideologies."

According to Baniyas: "The UFO narrative is full of examples that directly counter ideological Capitalism. Whether it concerns the theoretical free zero point energy, contactees returning with warnings concerning climate change

or global conflict from their abductors, or conspiracy theories concerning secret cabals of elitists, the discourse is in a constant state of dissent towards the current power system. On a more basic level, the supposed existence of intelligently controlled UFOs from another world is a direct challenge to current government and economic control. While humans may have succumbed to the Capitalist model, there is no guarantee that otherworldly beings have done so. UFOs themselves provide a possible future free of the constraints of modern Capitalist ideology, and... Capitalism is unwilling to accept that future, and die quietly in the night." And: "The UFO subculture, and the entire discourse itself... does not seek to alter modern Capital, but to end it. Whether the UFO community fancies government Disclosure, Light Beings, Channelling, CE5, or some other similar belief system, it attempts to create a worldview free of Capitalism itself."

I was about to say you learn something new every day. Except that something rather like anti-capitalism was being preached six-plus decades ago by the contactees. Those unjustly maligned entertainers were, as far as possible, written out of ufological history and significance by nearly all 'serious researchers'. Not much sympathy for peace, love, vegetarianism and lack of capitalism there. And one does wonder where all those fee-collecting speakers on the UFO lecture circuit and entrepreneurs like Stephen Greer and Jaime Maussan might stand on being told they were anti-capitalists. No doubt they and MJ Baniyas will find a way round it all. An eye will be kept open for the remainder of his series. And there'll be more post-modernity next time, too.

The undisclosed goal is to flush out giants hiding in Afghanistan's ancient cavern system



of 'Ufology as Quasi-Religion'. Sallas & Company may be seen as prophets, mingling and mangling current sources of global nervousness with obscurities from the Hebrew Bible and a bit of someone else's ancient religion (no coincidence either that Daesh is called ISIS, of course) to produce new conspiratorial Revelations. If it all seems a little mad, and more than a little comical, to most of us, it presumably soothes the souls of its creators and adherents.

WATCH THE SKIES, EVIL CAPITALISTS!

There's nothing quite like a spot of post-modern discourse to add to the gaiety of nations. Self-described philosopher MJ Baniyas has published the first of a three-part series titled *UFOs, Power Systems and Modern Capitalism* on his TerraObscura blog. Apparently, "the mainstream public's opinion on UFOs, and the subculture that explores the subject, is a negative one because it hinges upon the philosophical questions UFOs raise concerning



Alien abduction redux

JENNY RANGLES asks if recent discoveries mean it's time to reassess the case for ET visitors

In a recent column (**FT348:25**) I asked why alien contact cases have become an endangered species after once being the most dramatic type of close encounter case, reported with some frequency. I now believe this is just a phase in our human interaction with the UFO mystery.

Four hundred years ago, any mysterious events that happened around an individual – such as apparitions or teleportations – would be ascribed to the then common notion that witches existed and could exhibit such nefarious powers. It was an explanation that suited the era. But we would today mostly consider such a resolution absurd, a product of supernatural thinking. In the 20th century similar events can and do occur but – as we saw with the Godfrey UFO abduction in Todmorden, West Yorkshire (see **FT269:44-47**, **270:46-49**, **325:27** et seq) – such phenomena were interpreted quite differently, with aliens being the perceived cause for things once ascribed to the power of witchcraft.

I now believe that the 'UFO' phenomenon is eternal but the explanation placed upon it by society is ephemeral; and that this is really the key to understanding any possible intelligence behind any part of the mystery, outside and beyond the one that we know for sure is always involved – that is us, the human component through which every sighting is filtered into perception.

Whilst most comments that I received about my recent column were supportive, I received an interesting recent one asking if I now look back on it with different eyes. This was because in the months since I first expressed those doubts about any alien component to the UFO mystery, big discoveries have been announced about the prospects for alien life in the Universe.

These discoveries include the existence of the first Earth-like worlds in the Goldilocks zone around a star close enough to our Solar System to make space travel there imaginable with technology only just ahead of what we possess today. The Goldilocks zone (as in the fairy tale where the porridge is not too hot and not too cold, but just right) is a narrow band that surrounds every star, within which Earth-like conditions could prevail on any planet orbiting inside. One of these planets, GJ 1132b, in the constellation of Vela and about 39 light years away, has now even been found to be the first Earth-sized world to have a dense atmosphere, and, while it is thought to have a surface temperature too high for our kind of life, it may have steam, suggesting the



So in just a few months we might have found strong pointers that life is not unique, even in our Solar System

presence of water somewhere below that could be a key to some kind of life. Even more remarkable is the ice moon of Saturn, Enceladus, within light hours of Earth and a place we have already reached by NASA spaceship. It was never thought of as a candidate for life because of its frozen surface, far below any temperature at which human life could thrive. But close study of jets that are being emitted into space through cracks in its surface points to the possibility of liquid oceans deep under the ice, within which life could exist, as it does in similar environments on Earth.

So in just a few months we might have found strong pointers that life is not unique, even in our Solar System, and that it might be common on the millions of Earth-like worlds we now know to exist around other stars. And the odds that some of that life might have developed intelligence seem high enough that it now seems very probable. Which takes me back to the reader who asked whether my thoughts on aliens being the 'go to' explanation for UFOs mostly because of socio-cultural reasons have now changed. 2017's astronomical discoveries do make the theoretical likelihood of aliens existing 'out there' more probable. However, I have long assumed this to be true anyhow. It is still some way

LEFT: An artist's impression of GJ 1132b, an Earth-sized planet in the Goldilocks zone.

from any such life being intelligent, having the interest or ability to travel the Universe, and wanting to visit Earth so as to abduct humans from a lonely road in Yorkshire.

The so-called Fermi Paradox has long posed the basic question about the abundance of life, if proven by observation of the Universe. If it is out there, given that many star systems are millions of years older than our own, then where is it? Surely, some intelligent species would have travelled the cosmos and left signs of its presence wherever it went? Were we an uninhabited rock at the time and they simply passed us by? Did they study the dinosaurs and move on, with evidence of that trip destroyed millions of years ago? Is intelligence so rare and the Universe so vast that our paths have never crossed? Or is there available proof that we are misinterpreting as something else – suggested by the 'Gods and spacemen' school of thought in which the myths of ancient civilisations record encounters with advanced intelligences from space in an age when humans could not understand their true origin?

These are all options worth considering, and they make the concept of alien visitors feasible – but only that. My doubts have not been removed by the new discoveries, although they mean we shouldn't discount the possible reality of the strangest close encounters, even if there are better ways to interpret most unsolved cases. Two major reasons for caution over accepting an alien presence on Earth remain. Where is the physical evidence? When we have reached other worlds we have left junk on the Moon or 'alien UFOs' driving around Mars for years. Meteorite rocks, not of this Earth, are identified readily from their geophysics. But no hint of alien DNA or unearthly dust, let alone fragments of alien space metal, has ever been left here.

Then there is the problem of the 'observed abduction'. In almost every case where a witness chances to see someone else who claims to be abducted by aliens, the observer never sees them physically go *anywhere*, let alone into a spaceship. They might witness the person in an 'altered state', and might even independently see a UFO in the vicinity of the 'abductee'. That is enough to make the phenomenon a real one – but the alien interpretation remains a matter of perception.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

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FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

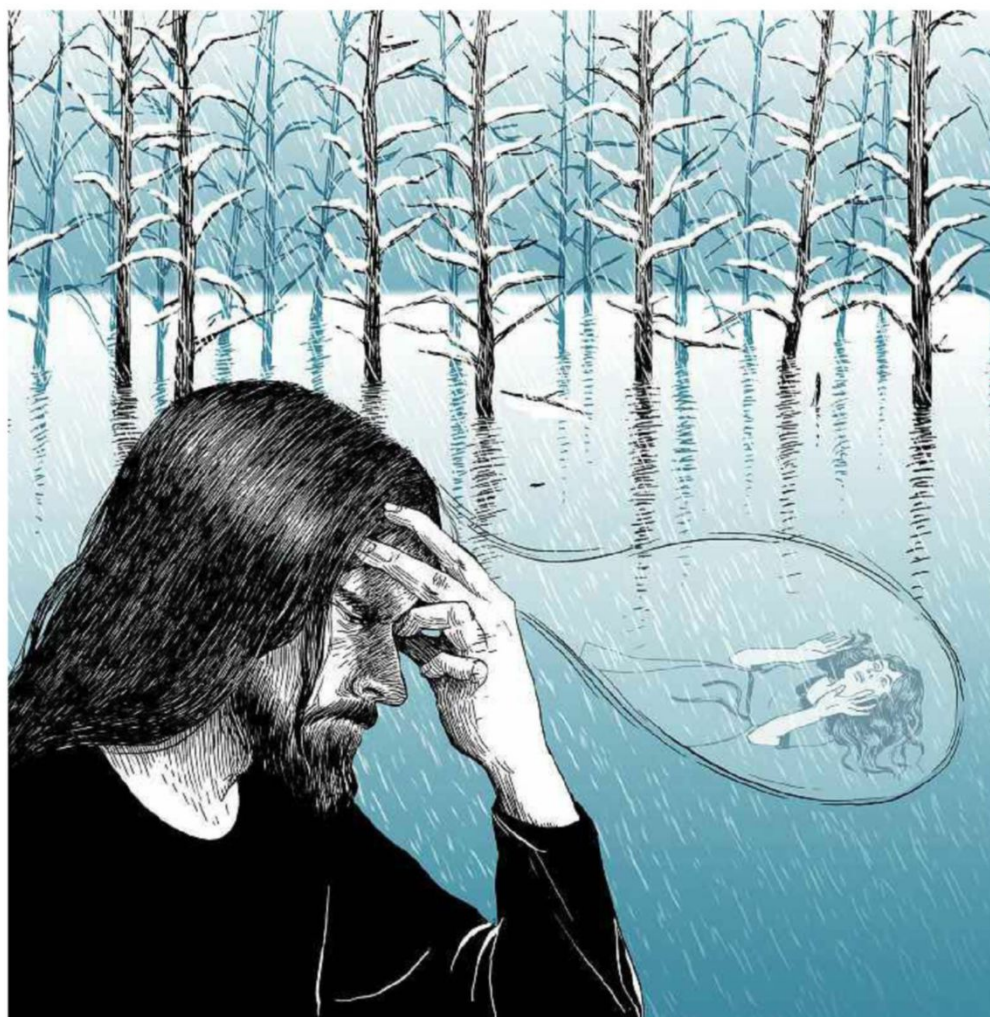
68 THE VANISHING OF GERTRUDE STRASSBURGER

THEO PAIJMANS examines the case of a 21-year-old Minnesotan woman who 'dematerialised' one day in 1902

Fort writes in *Lo!* about the baffling case of wealthy 24-year-old New York socialite Dorothy Arnold, who, one day in December 1910, vanished from the heart of one of the most bustling cities on the planet. To this day, the mystery remains unsolved: "It looks as if she had no intention of disappearing; she was arranging for a party, a tea, whatever those things are, for about sixty of her former schoolmates..." When last seen, Arnold said that she intended to walk through Central Park, on her way to her home. Fort concludes: "No more is known of Dorothy Arnold."¹ He might as well have written about Gertrude Strassburger, another young woman of good standing who had also disappeared under equally baffling circumstances eight years previously. This case parallels that of Arnold in many respects: Strassburger also vanished on a December day, and also amidst a crowd. Her vanishing was so abrupt, without trace or clue, that no one could offer a better explanation than that she had "dematerialised".² The second of December 1902 should have been as uneventful as any other cold winter's day. The 21-year-old woman had left home in Crookston, Minnesota, to skate with a party of her close friends, young men and women, on the nearby Red Lake River.

Arriving there, Strassburger and her friends enjoyed themselves on the ice for half an hour or more. Someone in the party suggested a race to a bend in the river, about a quarter of a mile downstream. All except Strassburger joined the contest. She had become a bit tired, she said, so would sit on a log by the riverside and act as the judge.

One of the young men gathered a few small branches and made her a fire near the



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

Not a trace of the young woman could be found... only a glove, still warm, lay on the log where she had been sitting.

log. The company then raced towards the bend. When the winner of the race returned, she was gone. He called to the others and together they searched for the missing Strassburger, but not a trace of her could be found. Only a glove, still warm, lay on the log where she had been sitting. Leading to the log were her footprints and those of the

young man who had made the fire. The only trail leading to the river was that made by the young man when he had left her to join the other skaters. Almost immediately the search began. She could not have drowned, as it was quickly established that there was no open water nor any holes in the ice for miles around. She had not fled from the spot,

as detectives found no traces in the snow. The snow in the woods at the edge of the river was likewise undisturbed. They concluded that Strassburger could not have left that particular spot. Her friends had heard no outcry or scream for help. All that could be said with certainty was that the young woman had dropped momentarily out of sight after her friends had left her alone and were skating on the river – a total of less than five minutes. She had been last seen sitting near the fire warming her hands, while her friends skated away. "She was sitting on the piling under the bridge. The

ice is a foot thick and there is no place where she could have fallen through. Moreover, none of her party skated outside the circle of electric light. Just before her disappearance she had spoken about going home", a newspaper added.³

The party raced back to Crookston, and when the news broke, hundreds joined the search up and down the river, but not a trace of the missing woman was found. Her father, Emil H Strassburger, was a well-known architect. He was born in Germany in 1853, and along with his wife Amalia and their daughter had emigrated to America, living in Texas for a while, then moving to Minnesota. The family now consisted of the parents, two sons Richard and Henry and a second daughter Ella. They had finally settled in Crookston in 1899. With the town's population having grown to about 7,000 people, a new city hall was needed and Strassburger was appointed to design it that same year. The architect was well connected and the city council immediately offered a reward of 250 dollars for his missing daughter. Concerned citizens doubled the amount, but nobody came forward. Gertrude's disappearance had become a mystery. In the absence of an official explanation, various theories sprang up, but each had its shortcomings. An elopement was suggested, but others pointed out that while Miss Strassburger was an attractive woman she had no male friends to whom she was particularly attached. Besides, it would have been impossible for her to leave in this manner, since her friends had been away no more than five minutes and not a trace of her footsteps could be found. The abduction theory was inadequate for the same reasons. No signs of a struggle were found and no cry for help had been heard. She was a strong, athletic girl, so

she would surely have put up some resistance to any would-be abductor, it was reasoned. She had not intended to leave home; she had made plans for the holidays and had counted on attending several parties and other social events.

The search lasted all night, and as it grew darker there were one or two in the party who imagined that they heard soft, low voices in the trees behind them. The next day the search continued. Detectives visited the place where Gertrude was last seen and combed her neighbourhood in search of clues. At one time it was thought that she might have taken the night train away from the city, but this was disproved. Towards the end of December, Emil Strassburger received a curious telegram. It said that his daughter was seen at Culbertson, Montana, a hamlet consisting of only a few houses. But then the communication ceased, so the father was convinced that the sender of the telegram had made a mistake and was "ashamed to answer further inquiries".⁴

The weeks went by, but still not a trace of the vanished girl had been found. A young man named Edward Chase, who claimed to be clairvoyant, began searching for her. After a week and several trances, he declared that her body was somewhere under the ice.⁵ Another clairvoyant, a Frenchman named DeBeau, came forward. "He looks like the clairvoyant, having long hair, a full black beard and a bead figure worked on his overshoes. He is reported to have found various missing things like stray horses and stolen money, and to be very clever in locating hidden things." Apparently he was able to accurately describe the Strassburgers, their house and "many other things about which he seemed to have no way of knowing". DeBeau believed that Gertrude had

left the river, gone to the neighbourhood of Hotel Crookston where, he thought, she was forcibly detained by a man in a room nearby. Unfortunately, the psychics were not able to successfully assist the police in the matter. DeBeau went home, "his mind very much tangled up over the affair". Chase stayed awhile, occasionally falling into his trances, but nothing came of it. "He succeeded, in his own mind perhaps, in locating her in the river near the South Crookston bridge," a newspaper wryly noted.⁶

As the months went by and the young woman remained missing, the focus of attention shifted. Who exactly was Gertrude Strassburger, and what was her story, some began to ask. While the first accounts described her as an athletic, merry woman surrounded by friends, a sadder, more mysterious side was revealed. "Miss Strassburger had a dark complexion and dark eyes. She had always been a deep thinker, and at various times in her life paid more or less attention to spiritualism, theosophy and the occult sciences."⁷ Her disappearance was a "dark and impenetrable mystery" and "the weirdest and most puzzling event Crookston has ever known. Was the young woman dematerialised? Many believe she was. They shudder, and in whispers declare her fading away was a translation to the spirit world without the agency of death. Spiritualists say Miss Strassburger departed by a ghostly flight through the aerial regions. Some believe she was lured into the spirit land by the shade of a former lover, who died years ago."

The article also claimed that, shortly before she vanished, she talked of 'spirit messages': "Do you know, said she to one of her girlfriends, I feel so queer. I have been hearing music and voices, it seems to me, and they seem to come from a distance. Just a little

while ago I heard Will call for me, and it seemed for a moment as if I must go to him." Will was the name of her dead fiancé, whom she was to have married. When he died, she was inconsolable for a time and since then was often heard to remark to her girlfriends that "it was only a question of time when she would join him". The final solution to her mysterious disappearance was therefore simple. "To some of her friends she has confided at various times that she was inclined to believe in the reincarnation theory, and that it would not surprise her to any day fade away in thin air, without leaving a trace behind."⁸

Footsteps suddenly stopping or missing in the snow; a party; a sudden disappearance; theories of dematerialisation and supernatural abduction through the air; disembodied voices heard in the distance: we find these narrative elements elsewhere as well. Not only in Ambrose Bierce's tales of disappearances (see FT194:43-44, 269:30-31), but also in what is perhaps the most famous of all stories of weird vanishings, that of Oliver Lerch (see FT335:42-47), published two years after Strassburger's.⁹ Hers might have been a baffling mystery equalling those of Arnold and Bierce – but it seems there is a postscript to the Strassburger affair. Six years after she vanished from a frozen riverbed, an inconspicuous announcement appeared in a German language newspaper in Missouri. "Finally the mystery is solved that surrounded the disappearance of daughter Gertrude of the architect E Strassburger," it claimed. "It has been established that the young girl resides in Spokane, Washington, and works in a millinery. What moved her to not announce anything about her stay and to remain hidden for her family and friends must still be clarified."¹⁰

NOTES

1. Charles Fort, *Lo!*, 1931, p90.

2. 'Was This Girl Abducted By Her Dead Lover's Spirit?', *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, Jackson, Michigan, 10 Jan 1903; 'Strange Disappearance', *Salt Lake Tribune*, Salt

Lake City, Utah, 18 Jan 1903.

3. 'Searching Parties Fail To Find Crookston Girl', *Minneapolis Tribune*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 4 Dec 1902.

4. 'Mystery may be Solved', *The Minneapolis Journal*, Minneapolis,

Minnesota, 23 Dec 1902; 'Only A Surmise. Girl Resembling Gertie Strassburger Seen In Montana, Minnesota', *Duluth Evening Herald*, Duluth, Minnesota, 24 Dec 1902; 'Lost Girl Not Found', *Minneapolis Journal*, 27 Dec 1902.

5. *The Spectator*, St. Hilaire, Minnesota, 21 Jan 1903.

6. 'Miss Strassburger. Two Clairvoyants at Crookston This Week but Fail to Throw Any Light on the Search', *Red Lake Falls Gazette*, Red Lake Falls, Minnesota, 15 Jan 1903.

7. 'Was this girl abducted by her dead lover's spirit?', *The Inter Ocean*, Chicago, Illinois, 4 Jan 1903; 'Was this girl abducted by her dead lover's spirit?', *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, Jackson, Michigan, 10 Jan 1903.

8. Ibid.

9. Irving Lewis, 'The Man Who Disappeared', *New York Morning Telegraph*, 25 Dec 1904.

10. *Inländisches, Hermann Volksblatt*, Hermann, Missouri, 29 May 1908.

The Haunted Generation

From children's TV to public information films, the 1970s were suffused with melancholy and disquiet. **BOB FISCHER** discovers how *Penda's Fen* and the *Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water* inspired a generation to creativity, and ponders the future of popular hauntology.

There are four of them, blank-faced children in old-fashioned pinafores, standing at the end of the street, staring back at me. They could be Edwardian; it's difficult to tell. Time is standing still here. The world has suddenly become fuzzy, vague, and sepia-tinted, and I'm filled with an overwhelming and inexplicable feeling of strange, melancholy disquiet.

They are, of course, the four children in the opening titles to *Bagpuss*. It's 1977, I'm four years old, and I'm watching Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin's immortal children's television programme in our shadowy, brown front room, clutching a mug of warm milk before the dancing flames of a roaring coal fire. At the time, I find it hard to put my feelings into words. Four decades on, I can try: the programme makes me feel simultaneously reassured and unsettled. It's filled with old things, lost things, tatty puppets and sadness; folk tales, ships in bottles, abandoned toys and long-ago kings. It's



LEFT: "Once upon a time, not so long ago": The opening titles of *Bagpuss*.

like television made by the ghosts of those Edwardian children themselves. It makes me feel, for want of a better word, haunted.

This wasn't just a feeling that I got from *Bagpuss*: it seemed to pervade much of my 1970s childhood. And it's a feeling that I tried to describe, emulate and recapture for over 20 years, without success; until, in the late 1990s, I heard a piece of music that so transported me back to that formative era of cosy wrongness that my 25-year-old self sat down in my childhood bedroom and gently wept.

It was an instrumental track called *Roygbiv* on the 1998 album *Music Has The Rights To Children*, the debut release by Scottish electronic duo Boards of Canada. I'm listening to it again as I write this, and it still makes me shiver. Woozy, vintage synths pick out a melody straight from some long-lost BBC *Programmes for Schools and Colleges* module, while the spectral voice of a child repeats some indistinct playground holler, possibly played backwards on a loop. I've no idea, but it doesn't really matter: the effect on me was profound. At last, I thought. Somebody understands my haunted, 1970s childhood. Somebody else has experienced those same feelings of lost, hazy disquiet, those memories of watching *Children of the Stones* on listless February afternoons and worrying about the ghosts that live in my Grandma's bedroom.

UNEASY LISTENING

I wasn't alone. Writer and graphic designer Richard Littler heard the call, too. "We're like the guy in *Close Encounters*," he tells me. "You think that no one can understand what you're talking about, but then you find all of these people that have had the same vision. My first feeling came from Boards of Canada too, and I remember when I first heard *Music Has The Rights To Children*, I couldn't believe that they'd caught a mood that was so specific."

"At that point they seemed like a one-off," says music journalist and author Simon Reynolds. "There was another artist at that time that I loved, called Position Normal, but I never really connected the two in my mind. It was only later that I thought, actually... these are the ancestors of Ghost Box. They both had the same effect on me, which was this almost involuntary feeling of being transported through time and assailed by these images; my mind being flooded with images of the past."

And Ghost Box? In 2005, musicians Jim Jupp and Julian House founded Ghost Box Records. It wasn't just a label dedicated to the musical expression of these fuzzy, disquieting memories, but also, effectively, a support group for the now middle-aged children still affected by them. Ghost Box is – according to the label's own website – home to "a group of artists exploring the musical history of a parallel world", and that parallel world is Belbury, an eerie English village straight out of a John Wyndham novel,¹ seemingly stuck in a perpetually unsettling 1970s of analogue synths, otherworldly children and unspeakable Pagan rituals conducted in the shadows of electricity pylons. From this fictional outpost of oddness, Jupp makes music as spooky, prog-tinged outfit Belbury Poly, House presents evocative psychedelic sound collages as The Focus Group, and early recruit Jon Brooks, recording as The Advisory Circle, has created entire albums inspired by the terrifying, authoritarian feel of vintage Public Information Films.

"Television from that era is the big touchstone for us," Jim tells me, "and those eerie moments, for me, came largely through *Programmes for School and Colleges*. As a kid, I spent a lot of time off school because I had pollen-related asthma. So I would sit around indoors watching *Programmes For Schools and Colleges*, and loving the ident music between the programmes. There was also something in the look of television from that era... the touchstone film for us would be *Penda's Fen*.² It's the way that the landscape has that grainy, 1970s TV look... it was there in all the location stuff on *Play For Today*. It's hard to put your finger on it, but there's something in the television images of that period that's just not *right*. It's kind of otherworldly."



BOTH PHOTOS: BBC 1974

"There's something in the television images from that period that's kind of otherworldly"



Sharing an ethos (and the occasional artist) with Ghost Box is the newer label Clay Pipe, founded in 2011 by artist and musician Frances Castle, whose taste in vintage television is strikingly similar. "*Penda's Fen* is the ultimate," she says. "That, to me, is very evocative of that time, and of childhood. It's very pastoral, and very eerie." Frances too cites the fuzzy, grainy look of archive TV presentation as a major contributory factor to this sense of childhood disquiet: "Everything was seen or heard through a slight hiss; the TV would go in and out of focus, and

that added to it. We're so used now to everything being crystal clear, but in those days it just wasn't. And obviously there were the programmes, too... *The Tomorrow People* I loved.³ *The Changes* I loved – all those sorts of things. They created an atmosphere, and a sense of unease."

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WHIMSY AND WEIRDNESS

Long seen as a lost, holy grail for lovers of archive weirdness, *Penda's Fen* was produced by the BBC as a 1974 *Play For Today*, and told the story of tormented gay teenager Stephen Franklin, whose emerging sexuality is at odds with his rigidly unswerving, and largely self-imposed, Christian and political beliefs. His internal torment manifests itself as a series of supernatural visitations amidst the rolling hills of Worcestershire: he is set upon by angels and demons, by the ghost of Edward Elgar, and by King Penda himself, the seventh century King of Mercia, and the last of Britain's great Pagan warrior-kings. It's a long way from *Bagpuss*, but the range of disquieting television cited as influences by this 'haunted generation' of the 1970s comfortably spans the gamut from pre-school whimsy to full-on adult weirdness. Jim Jupp claims the opening titles of Granada TV's schools' programme *Picture Box*, with their gently rotating jewellery casket and discordant waltz, as "the central image we had in mind when we came up with the name and the mood of the label". And somewhere in between lies Frances's beloved *The Changes*, broadcast by the BBC in 1975, depicting the post-apocalyptic rural nightmare of a Britain



LEFT: 'Music and Movement and Mime' – these children could have been dancing to *The Seasons*, intended to be played in schools. BELOW: The cover of the rather disturbing 1969 release.

that has inexplicably and involuntarily smashed up every single item of technology and machinery, at the behest of a mysterious, all-pervading klaxon. Another kindred spirit, and occasional Ghost Box collaborator, is archivist and fellow record label owner Jonny Trunk, whose Trunk Records was founded in the mid-1990s, with the long-lost soundtrack to seminal 1973 British horror film *The Wicker Man* among its earliest releases. While the Ghost Box and Clay Pipe rosters have thrown themselves into creating new sounds, Trunk has concentrated more on the unearthing of original, lost audio artefacts from the original 'haunted' era. The label's catalogue of reissues is a treasure trove of vintage strangeness, encompassing the gentle soundtracks to *Ivor the Engine* and *Fingerbobs*, the disquieting electronica of *Doctor Who* and Hammer Horror composer Tristram Cary, and the extraordinary *Classroom Projects*, a collection of disturbingly avant-garde music recorded by school orchestras and choirs throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

But it's Trunk's reissue of 1969 album *The Seasons* that has provided discerning listeners with perhaps the seminal audio example of school-age wrongness from this era. It marries the poetry of Ronald Duncan to the abrasively harsh electronic soundscapes of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop's David Cain. The imagery is vivid, stark and frequently unsettling...

*Like severed hands the wet leaves lie
Flat on the deserted avenue;
Houses like skulls stare through uncurtained
windows*

...and anyone born much later than 1980 may find it incomprehensible that this resolutely leftfield concoction was initially released on BBC Records as part of the BBC Schools Radio service's *Drama Workshop*

*"It wasn't a
problem for kids to
have that stuff...
Things weren't so
mediated then"*



series, intended to be played in primary school halls to inspire tiny children to creative dancing. "*The Seasons* is very much me, in a hall with a kind of parquet wooden floor and a big speaker," says Jonny Trunk, "with a bunch of kids wearing non-marking plimsolls, listening to it and following the instructions. *Music, Movement and Mime*. "It almost borders on the offensive. But if you're young, and you're told to improvise, and think about the music and the words, and dance and act along to them, then it sounds completely normal. It's like a hardcore childrens' education LP. It's hard. And that was the norm. It's definitely a

touchstone for a lot of people, that record." This institutionalised presentation of the utterly otherworldly to impressionable children was, according to Trunk, an important contributory factor to our collective haunted childhoods. "It was good to have a bit of avant-garde in your life, as well as some of these controversial subject matters," he suggests. "What we have now is oddly vanilla; what you're allowed to see and what you're allowed to hear is governed and over-thought. There wasn't any of that in the 1970s."

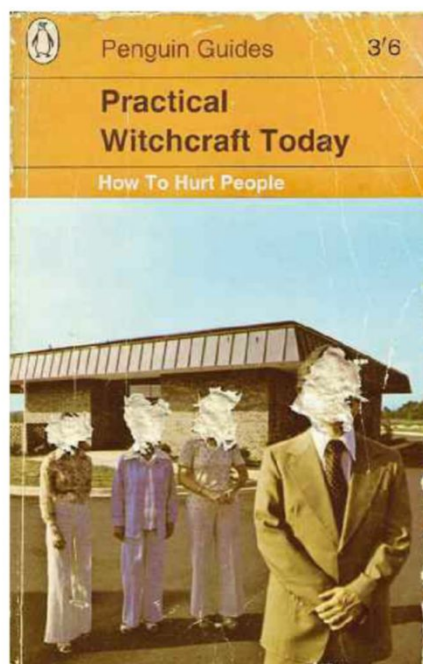
"I guess people were far less squeamish about these things," agrees Ghost Box's Jim Jupp. "When I was a kid, I remember having a Puffin anthology of horror stories called *The House of the Nightmare*,⁴ which I read when I was seven or eight. It was given to me as a Christmas present. And it was terrifying. It had old stories by MR James and Saki, as well as contemporary tales from the 1960s and 1970s. It wasn't a problem for kids to have that stuff. It did leave a lasting impression on me... obviously! Things weren't so mediated and categorised."

WELCOME TO SCARFOLK

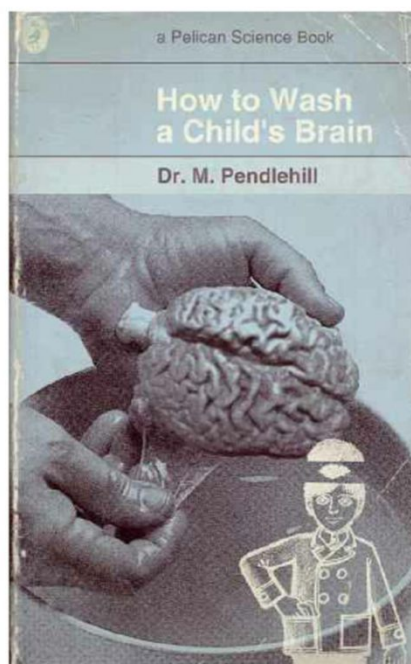
Also left with a lasting impression was writer and graphic designer Richard Littler, whose 'Scarffolk' project began life as an online blog, but in 2014 was picked up by publishers Ebury Press and turned into an acclaimed book, *Discovering Scarfolk*. Like the musical releases of Ghost Box, Scarfolk takes place in a fictional, parallel universe: the grim, north-western town of the title. But its vision of the 1970s is considerably darker; with Littler's unerringly accurate spoof book covers and mock government-issue pamphlets evoking the dystopia of an utterly unfeeling, authoritarian society. Scarfolk is the home of the informative Pelican Science Books title *How To Wash A Child's Brain*, the popular instruction manual *Practical Witchcraft Today: How To Hurt People*, the SG Games Junior Taxidermy Kit, and SBC Cassettes' 1973 bestseller *Illicit Recordings of You and Your Neighbours*.

"When I was a kid, I suffered from really bad night terrors," admits Richard, "and they cast an almost trippy haze over my normal life; because when you're three, four and five years old, you just don't know the difference. And the most mundane things could trigger it; I remember the Ladybird book *The Gingerbread Man* scaring the life out of me, because people were chasing him to eat him. Things like that were just horrific.

"I think I was a big baby, actually. Everything terrified me. And because of this strange, dreamy way that I had of seeing the world, things became blurred. And it didn't help that I was being shown videos



ABOVE: Richard Littler's spoof book covers evoke dystopian government pamphlets and terrifying public information films of the 1970s, like 1973's *Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water*, pictured below.



about being burned by fireworks, and that my parents were buying me books about horror... it was the 1970s, so I had Dracula and Frankenstein books. And I think it all just somehow merged. Very literally with something like the *Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water* Public Information Film, where you have Death standing on the riverbank, drowning children."

This 90-second film, produced in 1973 by the gloriously Orwellian-sounding Central Office of Information, has become an iconic symbol of this generation's lingering trauma. A hooded Grim Reaper figure, his face hidden beneath a monastic cowl, drifts along the periphery of litter-filled pools and flooded building sites, claiming the souls of drowned children, their flared jeans and hooded anoraks sinking beneath the surfaces of brown, poisoned water: "This branch is weak, rotten... it'll never take his weight," he hisses gleefully, in the unmistakable tones of Donald Pleasence.

And Richard is far from alone in seeing this amalgamation of the everyday and the terrifyingly supernatural as a defining characteristic of the decade. The 1970s has always struck me as a deliciously credulous era, when reported hauntings would be treated as semi-serious news items on regional TV programmes, when the works of Erich Von Däniken could be found on suburban bookshelves alongside the latest Jilly Cooper, and when documentary series like *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* would wantonly traumatise a generation of primetime ITV viewers.

"From Ghost Box's point of view, this is what really interests us in that period," says Jim Jupp. "We don't have a firm belief in anything... it's a forteen standpoint! But what's interesting about that period

is that you *could* believe in this stuff, and that that belief was less open to question. Especially as a kid, it seemed almost like... 'well, it's probably a fact that there are UFOs in the sky... or that there are ghosts.' A fairly sensible newspaper might cover a ghost story... or something like the Loch Ness Monster, which would flare up every few years. It wouldn't seem that unusual, it would seem just like *news*."

THE HAUNTOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

So is this loose collection of musicians, writers and artists a bona fide aesthetic movement? Well, in the last decade, it has drawn in a substantial number of contributors and followers, and – since 2006 – has had a widely recognised name:

hauntology. Appropriated from the writings of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who coined it in 1993 to describe the spectre of Marxism looming over post-Cold War Europe,⁵ its use in the context of the retro-spooky movement seems to have come largely from journalist Simon Reynolds. "I think a bunch of us started using the word," he tells me. "Mark Fisher was one of the other main writers, in his blog *k-punk* and in pieces for various magazines... so it was kind of a joint project. I think I might have proposed it as a genre name on my blog... 'We've got to call this something!'" "It has all these associations with Jacques Derrida, which are interesting, and I read his book about hauntology... but it doesn't really apply here. I just like the *word*, because 'haunt' obviously deals with ghosts and the idea that memories linger and creep into your thoughts without you having any control over them. And 'ology' has this idea of science and lab coats and people experimenting. There was a sort of faux-scientific aura about some of the stuff that Ghost Box was doing; the imagery was to do with science and planning and technocratic, bureaucratic order. So the combination of the 'ology' and the 'ghosts'... I like that clash of the two things."

Richard Littler, however, does see a vague lineage stretching back to Derrida's work. "Obviously popular hauntology doesn't have much to do with Derrida's idea about the ghost of communism haunting the present. But I think certain aspects of that *are* reflected in it. Particularly the idea of the 'dream of the future', where we were all going to be living in houses that looked like they were designed by [James Bond set designer] Ken Adam, and we'd all be heading to the moon. That dream of the perfect, utopian future that we were all aiming for... well, it never happened. When we were kids, there were so many books on how we would be living in the year 2000. But have you seen any recent books or TV



programmes predicting a utopian future? They don't exist any more. Basically, we've realised that it's foolish to try and guess how good the future is going to be... because it's going to be shit!"

THE SOUND OF LICHEN

But it isn't *all* supernatural trauma and failed utopias. Frances Castle's Clay Pipe label releases albums and artwork with a more bucolic feel; redolent of a 1970s childhood inspired more by *The Famous Five* than *The Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water*, but still with an undercurrent of lost, haunted melancholy. Early releases included the beautiful *Tyneham House*, an anonymously created concept album whose folky, flute-infused passages are a wistful tribute to the titular Dorset village, requisitioned by the War Office in 1943 and deserted ever since.⁶ "I think it's influenced by the Children's Film Foundation, that album," Frances tells me. "It's a brilliant record."

So too are *Shapwick* and *52*, a brace of evocative ambient albums recorded for Clay Pipe by Ghost Box regular Jon Brooks. "*52* is very much an album about his childhood, in quite an abstract way," says Frances. "When I first spoke to him about it, he was trying to create the sound of lichen in his grandmother's garden pond! And when I heard it, I thought 'Yes, that's it... that sounds like lichen!' So I think it's quite a personal album, but he's so good at what he does, that it's something everything can relate to."

Shapwick, meanwhile, tells the story of an epiphanic car journey undertaken by Brooks one autumnal evening in 2011, veering away from a gridlocked motorway to find unexpected inspiration amongst the twilight country lanes of Somerset. "We headed through several miles of unlit

roads, with nothing but gnarled trees and woodland either side, the car headlights suggesting the twists and turns ahead," Brooks himself wrote in the album's press release. "I felt a certain energy around the place..." Recorded on hissing analogue cassettes, the album's elegiac piano pieces, woozy synths and tinkling music boxes create a dreamlike atmosphere of almost overpowering melancholy.

This gentler, more rural school of disquiet has also brought Jonny Trunk under its mystical spell, and Trunk Records' 2006 compilation *Fuzzy Felt Folk* collected 15 long-forgotten recordings of vaguely eerie, but utterly entrancing, children's folk songs from the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of them intended for use in school hall *Music and Movement* lessons. Between softly plucked guitars and hooting ocarinas, we hear the Barbara Moore Singers harmonising softly around the more whimsical end of British folklore ("Down amongst the daises in the glen, lives a little elf called John...") and Irish actor Christopher Casson issuing dire warnings amidst a sea of folky wrongness: "My mother said that I never should, play with the gypsies in the wood. If I did, she would

"It wasn't normal, that telly. Playschool had weird rag dolls and Toni Arthur..."

say, naughty girl to disobey," he chants, in a rich baritone.

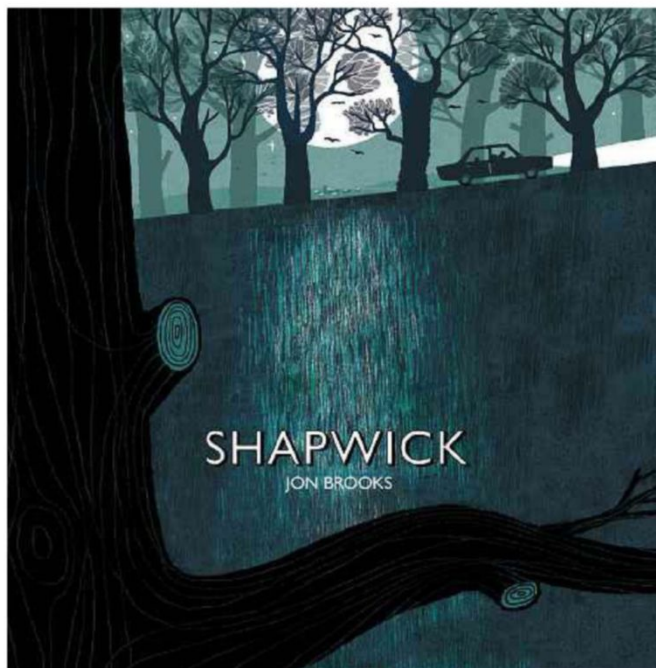
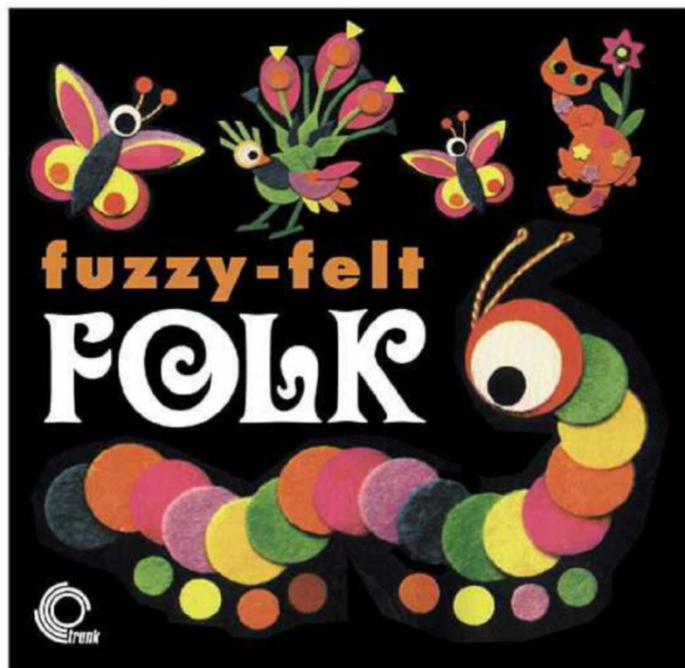
"The whole *Fuzzy Felt Folk* thing is very much harking back to things like *Play School*," Jonny tells me. "It wasn't normal, that telly. You had these weird rag dolls, and Toni Arthur... this woman who was quite spooky, making albums around the same time called *Hearken to the Witches Rune!*"⁷

LOST THINGS

So when did this all start? Was there a distinct beginning and end to the "haunted" era?

"For me," says Richard Littler, "if we want to talk about hauntology and that kind of odd, underlying unease, I think it starts with the Beatles. In 1967, you had *Sgt Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, both of which were about that particular generation harking back to the generation of their parents and grandparents. So there was a lot of Victoriana... *Sgt Pepper* is a Music Hall act, essentially. What they did was to look back, and – in the same way that myself and Ghost Box have done with the 1970s – mix it with a modern sensibility. Which at that point was psychedelia; so you have all of this history clashing together in the same artistic artefacts. And if you're harking back to Victoriana, it's inevitable that you're going to hit the Spiritualist Movement, so you're going to have séances and ectoplasm, and that filtered through... to things like *The Ghosts of Motley Hall* and *Rentaghost*."⁸

"And it goes to *Threads*, in about 1984-ish. After that, the culture turns to money". Jonny Trunk, however, thinks the origins of the era go back further: "I think you can see it earlier," he says. "In *Quatermass*, and in a lot of early science-fiction, in late 1950s and early 1960s British experimental filmmaking. And the more you dig around, the



ABOVE LEFT: The 2006 Trunk Records compilation *Fuzzy-Felt Folk* collected long-forgotten children's folk songs of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

ABOVE RIGHT: "Several miles of unlit roads, with nothing but gnarled trees either side...": Frances Castle's artwork for Jon Brooks's album *Shapwick*.



ABOVE: Ghost Box's Jim Jupp. BELOW: Frances Castle's artwork for the Clay Pipe label's *Tyneham House* album. "I think it's influenced by the Children's Film Foundation..."

weirder it gets. There were a lot of avant-garde music-makers around the UK in the late 1950s, and their music would have been creeping into radio broadcasts in the 1960s".

Frances Castle also takes inspiration from a pre-psychedelic generation of British artists. Clay Pipe Music's releases are accompanied by Castle's own distinctive artwork, and although the imagery is frequently redolent of Richard Littler's feared Ladybird Books, a mainstay of every primary school's library, Frances herself cites earlier influences: "The stuff that I've been inspired by was pre-1970s, and I've looked at a lot of print-makers from an earlier generation," she says. "But a lot of those books were still around during our childhoods... those school book covers, printed with very limited colour palettes. British artists of an earlier generation had that weird atmosphere to their paintings and pictures. People like Eric Ravilious had a hauntedness to their work." She does, however, concur with Richard Littler's pinpointing of the end of the 'haunted' era: "I think it goes away when the digital age arrives, and everything becomes very crisp and clean. So I guess the early to mid 1980s."

One curious aspect of the phenomenon is that not *everyone* gets it. Throughout the decades that I spent attempting to articulate these memories to my contemporaries, I was frequently met with bafflement, and for the majority of 1970s children, the decade seems to be remembered as an era of boundless fun, of endless summers spent bouncing on Space Hoppers while listening to the Bay City Rollers. I have these memories *too*, but



when I ramble about the sense of ill-defined 'wrongness' I got from watching *Bagpuss*, I am sometimes accused of adult revisionism, of retrospectively applying haunted qualities to experiences that I found perfectly normal at the time. But I maintain that I absolutely remember experiencing these feelings *as a child*. I asked Jonny Trunk if he thought it possibly took a certain *type* of youngster to appreciate them. "Totally," he replied. "If it affected everybody, we'd all be millionaires. Because everyone would say 'Oh my God, I've got to have every single record, because it reminds

me of all the spooky stuff!' You were either open to it, or you didn't take any notice of it."

"I think there probably is a certain type of child," agrees Richard Littler, "I've a feeling that if I asked my sister, who is only two years younger than me, whether she responds to these things in the same way... I don't think she would. I meet people who grew up in the 1970s, and they remember Abba. But I remember *Top Trumps* Horror Cards! I remember Abba *as well*, but they were cast in the light of all this horror."

So, given this utterly horrific and disturbing nature of much of this source material, is it perhaps surprising that so many of us look back on the era, and our own childhood disquiet, with a sense of warmth? Not according to Jim Jupp. "There's something cosy about the uncanny," he says. "If you think about MR James's ghost stories, they're designed to be read out loud around the fire at Christmas time. I think no matter how horrific a fantasy is, it's never as bad as the things that happen in the real world. Goths are quite loveable types, because their world is populated with vampires and demons, not with murderers and terrorists. It's far more comforting to imagine a world where there's just the Devil, and some demons, and some ghosts. They follow the rules! The supernatural gives us quite a comforting feeling."

Richard Littler, however, is less convinced. "I don't know if comforting is the right word," he says. "I don't like the idea of nostalgia, because to me that means looking back with rose-tinted glasses, as though it was a better time. Whereas I don't think

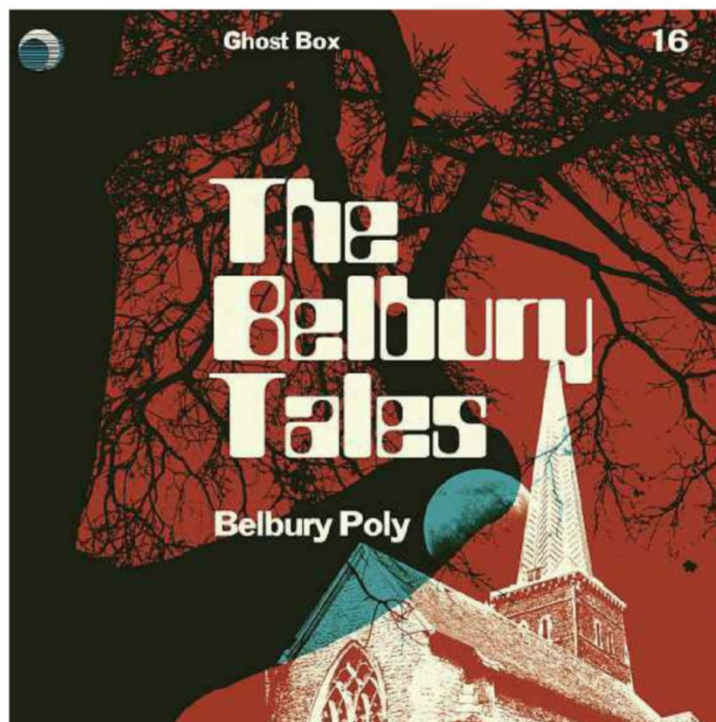
this particularly *was* a good time, and I wouldn't want to live there again. The sense of comfort that you feel... I know what you mean, but to me it's more like relief that I survived it."

I've used words like "fuzzy", "vague" and "nebulous" repeatedly throughout this article, and it's hard not to speculate whether the generation that grew up before the technological watershed of the 1980s might be amongst the last to remember their childhoods in this fractured, dreamlike fashion... simply because we were the last 'analogue' generation, reaching adulthood before the era when our everyday lives – and the popular culture we consume – were able to be constantly, digitally recorded and archived. I'd estimate that, during the first 16 years of my life, fewer than 100 clear photographs were taken of me; many of them now faded and orange-tinted, stored in musty albums in a battered, brown suitcase in the loft. No moving footage of me exists from before 1990, when I was 17 years old. And many of the most profoundly affecting television experiences of my childhood were viewed once, 40 years ago, in an era when I had no means of recording them, and no expectation that I would ever see them again.

Much of popular hauntology has a *yearning* quality, and I wondered whether the movement was, at least partially, an attempt to rationalise (and fill in the blanks of) a collective childhood that has become a delicious, jumbled mishmash of fleeting memories, inaccessible and unverifiable. And whether the modern childhood, where *everything* is recorded and accessible in pristine quality, where a thousand school bus journeys are documented on Facebook every day, and where every single TV programme is available for repeated, on-demand viewing, would result in a generation of 21st century youngsters for whom childhood nostalgia will be a *much* more clinical experience, bereft of that feeling of longing for *lost things*...

"Part of it is the fact that we can't get back to what we had, and we can't see it again," says Jonny Trunk. "But the memories are very vivid. And the fact that you can't get them is almost a good thing. Because that frustration results in creativity."

"What makes nostalgia work is information that's missing," agrees Richard Littler. "You have to have enormous gaps in your memory to create that strange mood. And if it's available to you online, in High



LEFT: Jim Jupp's 2011 Belbury Poly album *The Belbury Tales*. BELOW: "Everything terrified me...": A spoof information poster from Richard Littler's parallel 1970s dystopia.

"You have to have enormous gaps in your memory to create that strange mood..."

Definition, then you lose that sense of dreaminess and that feeling of 'Did I imagine it?'. The more we have completely exhaustive databases of information and media, the less chance we have of forming these completely odd disconnections.

"Before I started Scarfolk, I spent years having these single, bizarre memories... almost like a whiff on the air. 'I recognise that!' And that's one of the reasons I chose the 1970s for Scarfolk... it means I can give people a slight hint of a memory. The way the brain works is that, if you give it a piece of information, it will then try to extrapolate that to a full piece, to decide what something actually is.

That's why I choose visual images that most people will have forgotten. I wouldn't choose things that are still relevant, like Abba or lava lamps or disco... I have to choose things like a *Programmes for Schools and Colleges* test card, something that people might have a *vague* memory of... but there are gaps. And you fill the gaps with absurd fiction."

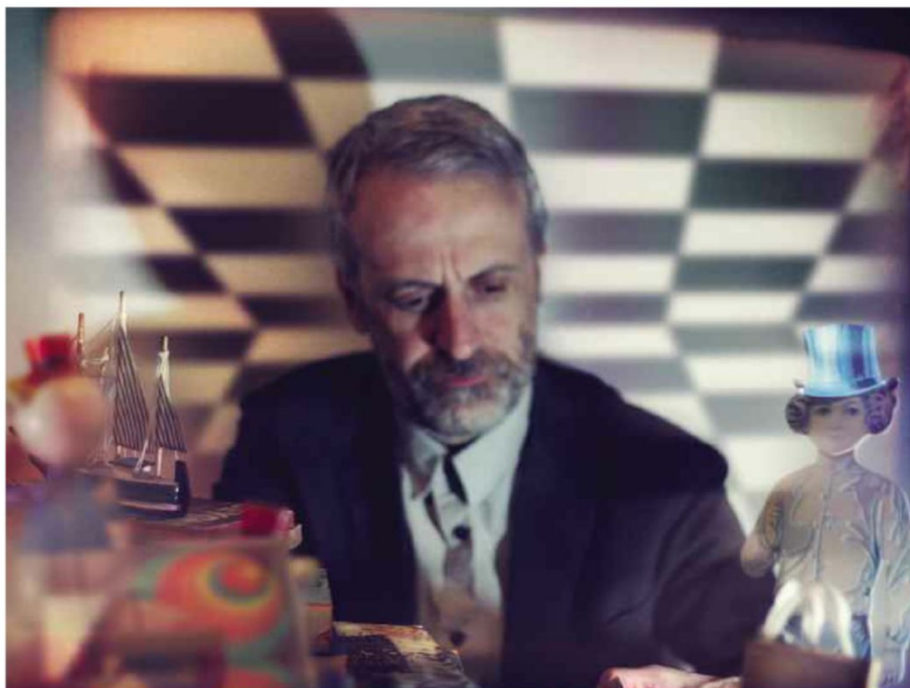
For Jim Jupp, this essence of "lostness" is a pivotal part of the Ghost Box aesthetic, and a chief factor in rooting the label's releases in the fictional, parallel world of Belbury.

"What became interesting for us was the idea of keeping a world where that sense of mystery – that 'what the hell *was* that piece of music?' feeling – was still there," he says. "Because that feeling is impossible in the Internet age, and we're keenly aware of that. So our focus became keeping that sense of mystery... but making it up! So the label had, from the outset, a fictional setting, where our images and sounds were familiar, but you couldn't look up the answers online. We had to kind of drag this stuff into a fictional realm where it couldn't be cross-referenced, and there would still be questions marks about the artists, the images and the sounds."

THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA

Ghost Box celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2015 with *In A Moment*, a lovingly compiled anthology of its most representative work, and a timely reminder that amidst the theorising and psycho-sociological pondering what really matters is the *art*. And what fabulous art it is, too; the product of a uniquely fun and evocative movement, where The Focus Group's *Hey Let Loose Your Love* evokes daydreams of Pan-worshipping maidens dancing naked around a gaily coloured maypole, where





ABOVE: Julian House, creator of artwork for numerous Ghost Box releases, including *We are all Pan's People* (2007).

Belbury Poly's *Owls and Flowers* attempts to navigate the hitherto uncharted passage between Alan Garner and Ultravox, and where – oddly enough – original synth pioneer John Foxx teams up with both Jupp and Jon Brooks for *Almost There*, a requiem for, I assume, a lost (or even ghostly) lover, but with a lyric that could just as easily be an elegy for our own receding, collective childhood experiences: “I see you walking past the waters, I glimpse you floating on the air...”

Speaking to Jim Jupp, I get the impression that *In A Moment* actually marks the beginning of a new era for Ghost Box, and he tells me that he's keen to consider the possibility of younger musicians mining hauntological feelings from eras much later than those typically referenced by the movement. “There's only so much you can explore within those few years of popular culture, so we're working with some younger artists, and pushing that world out to incorporate peoples' experiences of the 1980s and even the 1990s. It's good to have a fresh take on this idea of the misremembered and the undocumented past.

“One of our artists is about 10 years younger than us. He's a guy called Martin Jenkins, and he records as Pye Corner Audio.”⁹ A lot of his take on this stuff comes from the early 1980s, particularly VHS horror films, and John Carpenter videos. And even though it's outside of our initial period, it's still firmly in our territory. And when I think back to the 1980s, when I was a teenager, the medium of VHS in particular had a kind of haunted feel. There was a lot of distortion and degradation, tapes would change hands and you weren't sure where they came from, and there were rumours of things being illegal. It was still that era of mystery and strangeness on TV.”

Associated artists like Moon Wiring Club, the



prolific musical project of archive TV buff Ian Hodgson, have already begun to nudge the movement gently into the world of 1980s analogue computer gaming, with the track *Console Yourself* – on the splendidly-named 2014 album *A Fondness For Fancy Hats* – drawing heavily on the distinctive loading sounds made by a vintage ZX Spectrum. And Simon Reynolds, too, is hopeful that younger generations will keep the hauntological flame burning: “Every age will have its substrata of things you don't consciously register at the time, that you only register in retrospect, like the production or format qualities of the media you're consuming. You don't notice it at the time, but you can now look at a 1990s film and say ‘Oh, that is a period’. And even early 2000s movies can seem a bit clunky and dated. So maybe people will feel nostalgic towards the early days of pop music with autotune, and you can imagine a fetish for clunky early digital music, or early sampling. Maybe that will come to seem nostalgia-inducing in time. For old ravers, those things already do impart nostalgia...”

Like Richard Littler and Frances Castle, my own personal “haunted era” began to

dwindle in the mid-1980s, when the rustic, folksy vagueness of my early childhood surrendered to the addictive advance of console games and the march of digital music before, ultimately, being killed off by the mystique-eroding power of the Internet; and, if I'm honest, by my own adulthood itself. Even when exposed directly to the music, TV and film of later eras, I find it virtually impossible to experience a frisson of genuine nostalgia for *anything* that happened beyond the mid-1990s. But I'm thrilled to discover that younger generations – despite the hindrance of growing up in a multi-media, information-soaked age – are still finding hauntedness in the most unlikely of places: Richard Littler tells me of a young friend who recently claimed to be so traumatised by a half-forgotten childhood experience that they were unsure as to whether they'd imagined it or not. On further investigation, it transpired to be the *Judderman* television advert for the Bacardi-related alcopop Metz, first screened on British television in the year 2000.

As Jim Jupp says, “Maybe the future of it is the fact that childhood *itself* is a bit weird, and there's stuff lodged in people's memories that troubles them, that they can't quite explain... even in an era when they can look stuff up. Hopefully not all of the answers are there, and there's still some mystery and a sense of wonder.”

For further information visit ghostbox.co.uk, claypipemusic.co.uk, trunkrecords.com and scarfolk.blogspot.co.uk; and Simon Reynolds's blog (containing much of his writing about hauntology) is at blissout.blogspot.co.uk.

NOTES

- 1 Although the name is actually from a work by CS Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (The Bodley Head, 1945).
- 2 In May 2016, *Penda's Fen* was restored and re-issued by the British Film Institute, and is now available on DVD and Blu-ray from bfi.org.uk (see review, **FT343:65-66**).
- 3 Thames Television science fiction series about the ‘next stage’ of human evolution; original series broadcast 1973-79.
- 4 *The House of the Nightmare and Other Eerie Tales*, chosen by Kathleen Lines (Puffin Books, 1970).
- 5 *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* by Jacques Derrida (Éditions Galilée, in French, 1993; Routledge, in English, 1994).
- 6 Find out more about this extraordinary story at tynehamopc.org.uk, or tynehamvillage.org.
- 7 *Hearken to the Witches Rune* by Dave and Toni Arthur (Trailer Records, 1971).
- 8 Supernatural Granada TV series for children, starring Arthur English and Freddie Jones, broadcast 1976-78.
- 9 Pye Corner Audio's *Sleep Games* (Ghost Box, 2012) is a marvelously fresh, dance-infused take on the ‘haunted’ sound.

♦ BOB FISCHER lives on Teeside where he is a freelance writer and a radio presenter for BBC Tees. He has previously written for FT on the subjects of North Yorkshire's hobs and Alan Garner's fiction. He tweets as [@bob_fischer](https://twitter.com/bob_fischer).

Visit Hookland

FIONA MAHER spoke to David Southwell about the importance of place and how he brought a spooky and ‘forgotten’ English county back to life through Twitter...

In 1980, as part of their ‘Strange England’ series, Phoenix Garages published their guidebook to Hookland. Six years later, as a victim of Margaret Thatcher’s redefinition of Britain’s county boundaries, Hookland vanished.

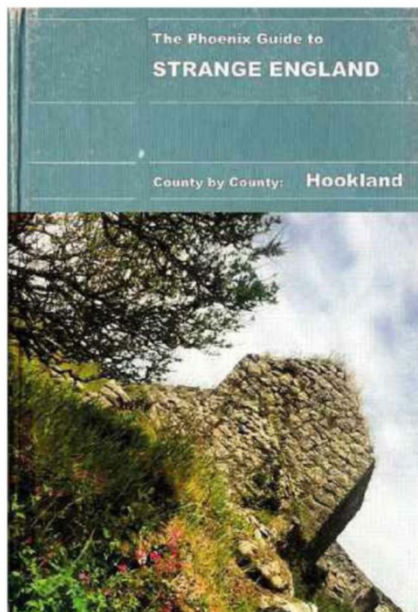
With its ‘corpse lanes’ and ‘cunning folk’, Hookland was a county that was often described as ‘liminal’ or ‘eerie,’ and has since slipped through the cracks in our collective memory. All that’s left to show that Hookland ever existed is ephemera such as *The Phoenix Guide to Strange England*...

None of the above is true.

Hookland snags the imagination with significant detail and fools the unwary. It is the conceit of writer David Southwell, and is as thoroughly tricksterish in nature as you might expect from someone who previously wrote non-fiction books about true crime and conspiracy theory. By 2012, Southwell was looking for a new direction. In a chance conversation with JG Ballard a decade earlier, he had been advised to concentrate on writing about place:

I wanted to do something that dealt with the ghost soil of Britain – all the folklore, all the high strangeness that grew and bloomed in the gloriously strange TV, film and books I grew up with as a child in the 1970s. I wanted to put the weirdness back. I strongly believe that re-enchantment is resistance and even back in 2012 you could see how the fight for the national narrative was going and how the ghost soil voice needed to be heard more strongly within it.

The idea of a county that never existed was born when Southwell created its map. That rough sketch, created in just a few minutes, suggested so many possibilities that he knew he had found something special. It suits the oddness of Southwell’s creation that he began revealing it on Twitter. Over the past five years, layers of history have accreted around the central idea and Hookland has been realised in 18,500 tweets. Many people began following @HooklandGuide after seeing Southwell’s contributions to #FolkloreThursday. Using Twitter means Southwell hasn’t the word count to explain his enigmatic posts. The result is a lightness of touch that makes Hookland especially compelling: because everything is suggested, it’s up to the reader to fill in the gaps. This deceptively simple device has garnered growing numbers of loyal fans. Anyone with an interest in folklore



“I believe that re-enchantment is resistance... the ghost soil voice needs to be heard”

or *English Eerie* will find this co-creation deliciously addictive.

Southwell credits listening to the news as a child in the 1970s as a major influence:

The news was dystopian prophecy manifesting: oil crises, killing fields, three-day weeks – as if our time itself was being stolen – Black Septembers turning to Cold War winters of discontent. Yet the high strangeness of the times meant it would cover UFO sightings, poltergeists and cryptids with exactly the same editorial voice of serious calm. The news treated the weird as normal and horror as everyday... I wanted to write something where I could put back all of the weirdness that has been edited out of cultural dialogue.

Hookland in all its strangeness is warped even more by the blending of sci-fi into its landscape. The Children of the Hum are a cult of electricity pylon worshippers, whilst

another cult, the Aetherians destroy pylons, believing they interfere with ley lines and are a cosmic magnet for UFOs bent on taking over the planet. Hookland was hit by a *Midwich Cuckoo* style event when, in 1969, children at a village school all began chanting: “Pavel Mikoyan is screaming on the Moon”. Within 48 hours, identical incidents were reported and all schools were temporarily closed: Pavel was seemingly a lost cosmonaut. It is weird, forteen strands like this that elevate Hookland from other folk horror revival material.

The county is peopled by an extraordinary cast. Where did Southwell find their unique voices:

The popular Detective Inspector, Roger ‘Cunning’ Callaghan, who investigates anything with a whiff of ritual or the occult is based on a senior ex-Vice and Drug Squad detective who was this wonderful mix of spiritual insight and a policing-with-your-fists 1970s copper. My pastiches of John Betjeman’s non-existent BBC TV series The English Alphabet even drew angry letters to the Beeb and to me from one American Betjeman scholar. However, some things are sacred to me, beyond pastiche, and Arthur Machen is one of those. I wanted a Machen-like voice in Hookland and so that led to the creation of CL Nolan, an Edwardian writer of strange stories.

The haunting tweets quoting CL Nolan are often accompanied by dramatic monochrome shots of bleak landscapes, tilted at expressionist angles. Nolan’s words are poetry:

I shunned the church with its brutal, fort-like tower for the sermon of blossom falling like soft rain.

Evocative images match almost every tweet, from cleverly manipulated book covers perfectly in keeping with the time they were allegedly written, to old British Rail posters, to album covers by Hookland bands. So why present it as a guidebook?

I have often said Hookland is partly a love-letter to Paul Nash and it really is. I chose to tell many of the stories of Hookland through a guidebook format not only because of a childhood love of guidebooks, but because it let people create their own joined-up narratives from small glimpses. However, that choice was also a direct tribute to Nash’s 1935 Shell Guide

to Dorset. Nash was this incredibly powerful artist who understood and captured the strangeness stored in the English landscape. He had this incredible ability in his paintings and photography to playfully connect the past and present through place, manifesting not just in folklore, but a sense that even distant dinosaur eras could still be felt in the stones: a sense that profound primitive mysteries could be glimpsed in dead trees and the plough-broken barrows. He directly inspired me to ensure that Hookland had a sense of personal mythology and ancient Albionic mystery manifesting through place, through an environment that everyone could recognise as their own. That ever-present sense that the land itself is in us, that we enjoy a constant relationship to it.

Southwell has created a Hookland 'bible' to keep track of the multiple characters, places and situations, and its scope is breathtaking. It lists the settlements of Hookland, down to the *drifts*, a local word for those tiny rows of two or three houses often seen on country roads. Everything has been considered, from the police authority to food. The county produces two cheeses, Stinking Tom and Burnt Bishop and a local delicacy is *plate pudding and scrap*, an elaborate toad-in-the-hole. Thirty varieties of apple originated in Hookland and the locals have a preference for pork over any other meat.

This prosaic detail makes a perfect foil for the overlay of weirdness that Southwell creates. One tweet speaks of "doomed archaeologist Copeland Blight", the word *doomed* conjuring up every cursed artefact story you've ever read. He wrote this about Hookland's canal network:

The cut has a malignant gravity that seems to pull unsettling stories to it. Drowned babies, eel-eaten corpses found floating, strange knocks on the underside of boats at night, all leading CL Nolan to say in a 1933 BBC radio talk: 'The canals are veins furred with trauma'.

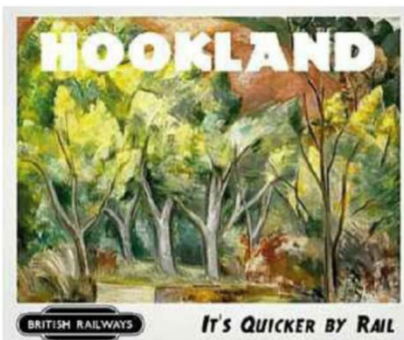
In the oddly but plausibly named village of Finchford Dignity, the Black Frog pub boasts a haunted grandfather clock of which Nolan writes:

There were souls trapped between the tick and the tock. Souls he could hear whisper just before the chime.

This enchanting observation of a clock 'drawing breath' before striking is supported upon foundations of compelling detail; the Hookland 'bible' adds that one Timothy Tidy bequeathed the clock to the pub in 1876:

Regulars will retell the clock's tale and if a glass smashes, a shout goes around the bar of: "Careful Timothy!"

I've never heard this in an English pub, but it's pitch-perfect; a typical local oddity no one pays much heed to anymore but



which a visitor might ask about. Whilst almost everything is covered in Southwell's comprehensive guide, there's one obvious omission: Hookland's exact location:

It is about 90 miles from [[REDACTED]], a journey that takes two hours and five minutes on the fastest train and about two and half hours in a fast car if the gods are with you.

Famous people have been there – Aleister Crowley and Sir John Betjeman among them – and you can go too, for Hookland is common land and open for anyone to enjoy. Southwell isn't precious about his creation: you can borrow whatever parts of it suit you best. You can take what you wish and make of it what you will:

Making it open means people can use it in any way they want, which throws up such wonderful, unexpected directions. I didn't expect people to write music inspired by it. I didn't expect someone would have written a novel set in it even before I'd finished my own publications on the county. I'm gloriously delighted when someone asks if they can use a CL Nolan quote in a book or mention the county in a horror film they are making. I'm overjoyed when some asks for a visual guide because they want to do Hookland-inspired graffiti or paint portraits of cunning folk

that previously only existed in their mind, but that they hadn't realised it till they began walking in the county. I never expected to be interviewing people playing their own fictional creations that reside in Hookland before live audiences or selling hand-drawn maps of the county to people living in Hollywood. Hookland is one imaginary place where no one evicts you when you try to build a home there and where no-one ever tells you that there are planning regulations. The only decent imaginary places are those that escape from their creators and I'm pleased that Hookland is well on the way to that already.

If you reciprocate with the same openness and allow others to build upon your contribution, it will become canon and you will have made your own, lasting mark upon Hookland. The 'bible' runs to around 60,000 words; with all this material, I asked

Southwell if he'd ever thought of getting it published.

There will be at least two limited edition Hookland mini-books out this year featuring a mix of original fiction, essays and comics strips as well as a set of the Hookland Horror folklore of the county playing cards by Maxim Griffin and myself. There is an anthology of other authors' tales set in Hookland in the works already, but the things I really hope to find a publisher for are the Bible and The Guide. Of course, if anyone wants to publish an 80,000-word dialect dictionary from a county that doesn't exist, they can have that as well...

I 'found' a guide to Hookland in a junk shop in Shrewsbury, and went there to research the infamous Mordant family; local aristocrats who had contact with the realm of Faerie long ago. I suffered satnav malfunction, became hopelessly lost and dropped my phone so it only took moody, monochrome photographs. At the time @HooklandGuide retweeted my plight with the unsettling observation: *I have a terrible feeling this will not end well.*

I escaped, eventually, but Hookland left its mark.

David Southwell's creation has a way of burrowing deep into your psyche and resonating with latent memories; setting up a tension that's disturbing and comforting, like stroking an old scar. I doubt I'll ever be free of Hookland. Then again, *I don't want to be.*

Find Hookland and David Southwell on Twitter: @HooklandGuide and @cultauthor

❖ FIONA MAHER is the author of *The Last Changeling* and the *Horror in a Hurry* series of novellas. She is the organiser of *The Legendary Llangollen Faery Festival*.

Unusual finds in parish registers

Amongst the thousands of names and dates that make up parish registers, there are often recorded anomalous events, from freak weather to six-toed infants and strange deaths. **HELEN BARRELL** shares some of her weirder finds from the county of Essex.

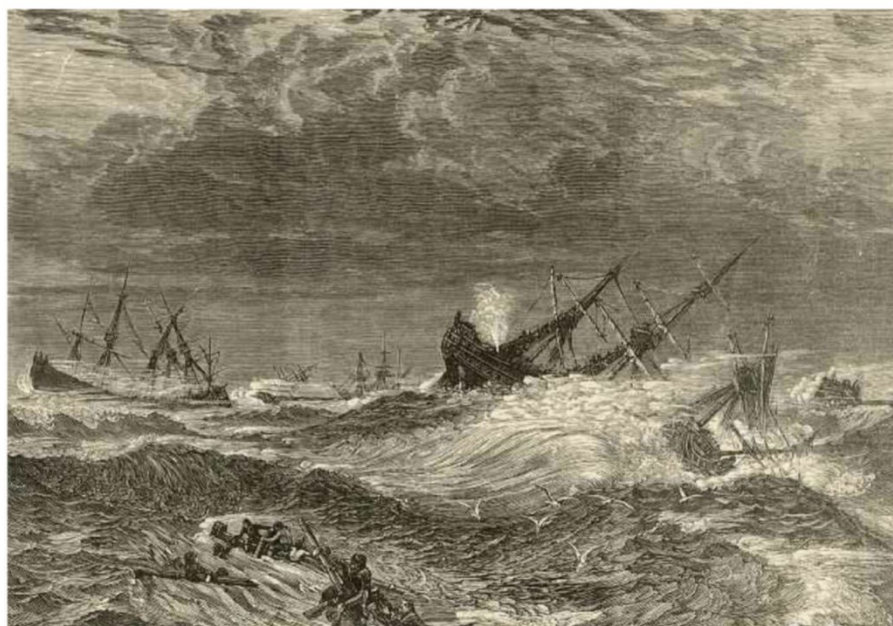
“Here To be born & die of rich & poor makes all the history.” From West Bergholt’s parish register, 1771-1812.

Family history has become increasingly popular of late: now that so many records are available online, it doesn’t involve as much squinting at scratched microfiche or rummaging in parchment at county archives.

Parish registers are vital for anyone hoping to trace their family back before 1837, the start of civil registration (in England and Wales); commercial genealogy websites fight for customers by making these documents available. They began to be kept in England from the middle of the 16th century, but coverage varies depending on how well they have survived Civil War, fire, flood, theft, damp vestries and hungry rodents. Although parish registers’ main purpose is to record baptisms or births, marriages and burials, in many cases they were the safest place for the reverend incumbent or his clerk to record the life of his parish, however strange it might sometimes be. It is thrilling to identify your six-times-great-grandfather with his unfeasible 18th-century name, but serendipitous fortune in faded ink can also be found amongst the lists of names and dates. For some years, I have been transcribing the registers of parishes in Essex and have stumbled across all sorts of gems, some of which I will share with you...

WEIRD WEATHER

The Great Storm of 1703 was perhaps the worst in Britain’s history. It killed over 100



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

people on land, and 8,000 mariners around the British coast. Hundreds of ships were lost, and more than 400 windmills were destroyed. A largely rural county on the North Sea coast, Essex would have felt the full force of this nightmarish storm, but its parish registers are, in the main, conspicuously quiet about it, perhaps because the ravages were so severe that there simply wasn’t time to record it. Rayleigh’s parish register spares a couple of lines to tell us that Queen Anne appointed a day of “Fasting and Humiliation”; the incumbent gave thanks that he had survived the storm unscathed. But a dramatic

ABOVE: The Great Storm of 1703, “the most outrageous tempest that ever was heard of”.

description appears in Purleigh’s register: “Novemr. the 26th 1703, about one of the Clock in the morning, there arose the most outrageous tempest that ever was heard or read of in England, it was held till seven or eight a clock in ye morning, it lay’d naked most peoples dwelling houses, out Barns, Stables & all other out houses, & multitudes of them were levelled with the Ground, it blew down Steeples, unript our Churches, & made thousands of tall and sturdy Oakes, Elmes & other trees root body & branch to

submit to the violence of an outrageous blast, that brought them to the ground, & made them fit fuel for the flames.”

Lightning is often mentioned in the registers, not surprising when the church steeple would be one of the tallest structures in the village and therefore the most likely victim of a lightning strike. Barnston (1665), Bures St Mary (1733), Great Hallingbury (1738) and Great Burstead (1822) all record their spires being either damaged or destroyed by lightning. Abbess Roding’s church sensibly installed a lightning conductor, and this is mentioned in their register in 1903.

Hatfield Broad Oak’s curate made a note about an extremely violent hailstorm, which took place on 5 June 1795. “A tremendous Tempest of Thunder, Lightning, & Hail between the Hours of three and five in the afternoon ever remembered. The devastation made by it was almost incredible. The hail stones some of them measured four inches in Circumference, and they laid in some parts of the Town 5 feet deep for eight days. By the violence of the hail the Wheat and Barley suffered considerable damage. Most of the Windows in the Town were broke; and all the fruit Trees & gardens were totally demolished.” In July, he noted the inflation in the price of wheat (which caused riots in some parts of the country), though he adds: “But a prospect of a very fine Harvest & the Wheat & Barley come abt. surprisingly since the above Tempest – which was partial, and extended not quite a Mile in length and a quarter of a Mile in bredth.” The same register records another harsh hailstorm, affecting a far larger area, on 24 July 1824, “by which a very large portion of the crops in the county of Essex were destroyed, the stalks being as completely severed as if cut with a sickle.”

Six years later, on 7 February 1830, a severe frost is noted in Hatfield Broad Oak’s register: “A frost of 7 weeks broke up today. Temperature 12 degrees below freezing point! Many persons frozen to death.” On that same day, five-year-old Betsey Rogers was buried at Hatfield Broad Oak. A note in the register records that she was burnt to death, presumably as she tried to warm herself by the fire.

The practice of recording unusual weather events continued into the 20th century. Great Maplestead’s register records the damage caused by the 1987 hurricane: “On the night of October 16th 1987, there was the worst hurricane in the south of England since records were kept. Nationally 15 million trees were blown over. In this parish more than a thousand fell. Fourteen came down in the Vicarage garden; four of them were about 200 years old. There was some structural damage to the church and a few houses in the village. Here no one was injured.” It’s interesting how the tone little differs from that of 18th and 19th century notes on extreme weather.



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“The hail stones some of them measured four inches in Circumference”

STRANGE DEATHS

Just as unusual deaths are reported in the media today, they also appear in parish registers. Burial records did not demand a cause of death (unlike death certificates, issued from 1837 in England and Wales), but if someone met a particularly unusual end, then it might have made it into the parish register.

Binge drinking is a longstanding pastime of the British. We find a burial in Beaumont-cum-Moze in 1744 – in the middle of the 18th century gin craze – of John Brasted of Kettlebaston, Suffolk, who “dyed suffocated with Geneva”. Quite why he was so spectacularly tiddly 30 miles from home isn’t explained – indeed, the “suffocation” could even have been a poisoning caused by cheap, impure spirits. John Dimond, “a reputed good Fidler”, was buried in North Shoebury in 1764. He “had drunk too freely and fell into a ditch by the roadside from whence he had scramble’d out, but ye weather very cold and wet, tis belev’d he perish’d by those means, lay five hours perishing and was found in ye road just expiring, the Coroner’s jury brought it accidental death.”

In 1711, two men were smothered in an accident at Fingringhoe’s gravel pit. John Symons is recorded in the register as “a

ABOVE: Lightning strikes feature regularly in parish registers; churches were often victims.

wicked and profligate man” so “the office was not read” at his funeral. The second man, Francis Baker, “suffered in the same calamity but lived some days after and seemed to die a good Christian”. How they had lived was clearly of as much importance as how they died.

Another death that might have left locals wondering if God was dishing out just desserts was that of William Taylor of Beaumont. In 1581, this unfortunate chap was “was kylled w. a bell out the church Steple wh. fell opoon hm and was found the cause of death.”

Strange coincidences can be found in Lexden, just outside Colchester. In 1828, John Beaumont was “killed by falling down a well”; 17 years later his son, Jeremiah, died “by the falling in of a well upon him.” Thomas Beaumont was buried in 1828 in Lexden, “found drowned” – whether or not this was in a well, too, the register neglects to say.

The wording sometimes makes these deaths sound more amusing than they are: in 1832, 77-year-old Robert Barnard of Hatfield Broad Oak died of “old age accelerated by a fall down stairs.” Many died by the dreaded “hand of God” – a death which undeveloped medical science could not then explain. The numerous deaths caused by waggons, carriages, and kicks by horses are the equivalent of our automotive accidents.

Unfortunately, many registers are frustratingly silent despite the parish not being short of bizarre events worth recording. A gravestone in the churchyard at High Ongar records two unusual deaths. The stone, paid for by subscription, was erected in 1828 to commemorate two local lads – John Lucas and William Mead, whose

names appear without comment in the register as if they had died perfectly ordinary deaths. The still-legible carving on their joint headstone tells us that: "These two young men while imprudently sheltering themselves under a Tree in this Church Yard during a Thunder storm were killed by Lightning." The inscription continues in typically windy 19th-century style, the stone having been erected to remind people that "In the midst of life we are in death" etc. To read the inscription on this stone, which is now leaning at a perilous angle, you have to lie on your back underneath it. Take care, gentle stranger: if it falls on you, there might be another opportunity for a moralising monument to be put up in High Ongar churchyard.

BIZARRE BODIES

Sometimes nature throws a curveball and babies are born in unusual style. Polydactyl children are unusual enough to gain a mention in parish registers; in 1737, Mary Wighborough was baptised in the village of Tendring, near Harwich in north-east Essex: she had 10 fingers and 12 toes. She died not long after her birth, so her multiple digits might hint at other physical problems. Less than 30 years later, another polydactyl child was born in north-east Essex: Paul Ingate was baptised in 1765 in Brightlingsea, an oyster-fishing village about 10 miles from Tendring. He was "born with six fingers upon each hand and six toes upon each foot." He died two years later.

More unusual was the birth in 1687 of Samuel Gonner's daughter in the parish of St Peter's, Colchester. She was born "with but one head but three distinct tongues, four arms, hands and shoulders, four legs, thighs & feet; two bodies join'd together at the neck; the head standing with its face between the two bodies above the shoulders. Each body had one breast, back and all parts proportionable to a female child below the neck; it had two crowns separated behind on the head, with very thick curled hair." The detailed description allows us today to suppose she was a conjoined twin. We shouldn't be surprised at what happened next: "It lived about an hour and a half and was afterwards carry'd up to London for a sight." There is no further mention of this little girl in the register: she was not, it would seem, buried in her home parish, so was perhaps interred in London after her remains had been exhibited there. Or she may even have been kept for posterity in a specimen jar and quietly floats there still.

Legend has it that during the Siege of Colchester, the Royalists placed a canon at the top St Mary's-at-the-Walls' church tower –



LEFT: Edward Bright, the 18th century "fat man of Maldon".

BELOW: Bright's waistcoat commemorated in a bronze relief.

they called it Humpty-Dumpty. When the Parliamentarians successfully blasted the canon to smithereens, they took half the tower away with it; the tower today starts off in Mediaeval stone and segues into brick. Less than 100 years after Humpty-Dumpty's great fall, a child called William Halls was baptised at St Mary's-at-the-Walls (the walls being the perimeter of Roman Camulodunum). A long note in the register accompanies his baptism, describing in detail the deformities that poor William was born with. His jaw, mouth and nose hadn't formed properly, and he was also polydactyl; he only lived for 24 hours. The detail in this entry should not come as a surprise when we consider it was written by Philip Morant, antiquary and historian, who perhaps realised his key role in recording the world around him for the historians of the future.

In Manningtree in 1709, William Gibbins was buried, apparently "the tallest man in Britain." Was he indeed? Alas, nothing in the register has been left to tell us anything more about this intriguing chap – his height, for one thing, is a rather important fact that has been omitted.

More detail exists about Edward Bright, the semi-legendary 18th-century "fat man of Maldon" (see FT58:55), who tipped the scales at 43.5 stone (276kg). His waistcoat can still be seen today in Maldon Museum, the marshland town where he worked as a grocer and chandler (there is even a road named after him in the town). A bet was made in a pub that 'seven hundred men' could fit inside Bright's waistcoat: the bet was lost because seven men from the Dengie Hundred (Hundreds are an old way of dividing up counties into smaller areas) could fit inside it, but clearly not 700. Pictures circulated of the seven men standing inside the waistcoat, and a bronze relief depicting this clearly chucklesome moment hangs on the wall of a Maldon shopping centre.

When Bright died of typhus in 1750, the vicar, William Benton, went to great pains to record in the register the remarkable arrangements made for the funeral: "His coffin was three feet six inches [107cm] over the shoulders, six feet seven inches [200cm] long, and three feet [90cm] deep. A way was cut through the wall and staircase to let it down into the shop; it was drawn upon a carriage to the church, slid upon Rollers & interr'd by

"His coffin was slid upon Rollers & interr'd by the help of a Triangle and Pulleys"





LEFT: Panic on the streets of Colchester during the Essex earthquake of 1884. **BELOW:** The church at Langenhoe sustained terrible damage.

the help of a Triangle and Pulleys.” Still marvelling at Edward – the size he had reached at a comparatively young age, and the fact that his libido had shown no sign of flagging – Benton records that “he was 29 years of age the first of March last; has left a widow now big with her sixth child.” But all this aside, Benton finishes his long note in the register by fondly remembering Bright as “a very Honest Tradesman, a facetious companion, comely in his person, affable in his temper, a kind husband, a tender Father and valuable Friend.”

WITCH COUNTRY

One of the most famous of the English witch-hunts began in the 1640s in Mistley, under the auspices of Matthew Hopkins, self-styled Witchfinder General. In some cases, you can look through parish registers and reconstruct the families of the accused and their accusers. Mistley’s parish register gives us clues that explain why Hopkins was in the village in the first place: he was, it seems, the stepson of Mistley’s rector.

When he was buried in Mistley in 1647, a note beside his burial in the register says he was the “son of Mr James Hopkins minister of Wenham”. There are wills that pinpoint the Hopkins family as living in Great Wenham in Suffolk, not far over the border from Mistley. Hopkins’s father had died by 1634, and Mistley’s rector, Thomas Witham, had lost his wife (who rejoiced in the highly unusual but clearly Puritan name of Freegift) in 1633. It would make sense for James Hopkins’s widow to have married Thomas Witham, and a burial in Mistley in 1641 for one John Hopkins “sonne to Marie Hopkins (wiffe to Mr. Tho. Witham parson)” is very good evidence to suggest that Matthew Hopkins was Thomas Witham’s stepson.

This is important when we consider at what point Matthew Hopkins joined the witch-hunting fray. Thomas Witham’s daughter, Susan Edwards, accused local

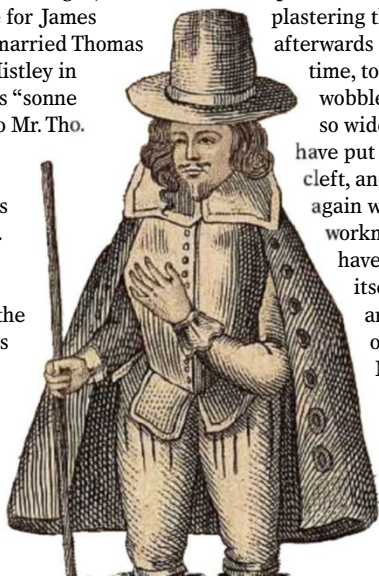
woman Elizabeth Clarke of using witchcraft to bring about the death of her son. At the time, Mistley had no incumbent: Witham went to London as a preacher in 1643 and, in the turmoil of Civil War, wasn’t replaced until his son John Witham took over in 1647. With Hopkins as stepson of the incumbent and son of a vicar himself, and with Susan the wife of an important and wealthy Mistley resident, they had authority in the parish and were plugged into social networks, which included the Justices of the Peace who would prosecute the ‘witches’.¹

So when Matthew Hopkins took to the stage as a Witchfinder, he was in fact avenging the death of his (step-) nephew. Whatever excesses his later witchfinding might have reached, it appears to have begun as a personal, family vendetta.

THE SKY ABOVE, THE EARTH BELOW

In 1884, an earthquake visited north-east Essex. It caused terrible structural damage, killed two people and (as you shall soon see) probably set the stage for a haunting. But it wasn’t the first time the area had known the ground to shake.

Thursday 8 September 1692 was a memorable day, for at about two o’clock that afternoon an earthquake was felt across a wide area of Europe – not just in England, but also in France, the Netherlands and parts of Germany. At the very moment this quake struck, two stonemasons were at the top of St Peter’s church in Colchester, plastering the steeple. Both men swore afterwards (no doubt they swore at the time, too, when their scaffolding wobbled) that “the steeple parted so wide in the midst that they could have put their hand into the crack or cleft, and immediately shut up close again without any damage to the workmen who expected all would have fallen down or to the steeple itself. Most of the houses here and elsewhere shook, part of a chimney fell down on North Hill, and very many who were sensible of it were



taken at the same time with a giddiness in their heads.” This testimony was written in St Peter’s parish register by the reverend incumbent, who signed his name, thus giving the report an air of authority.

After several years of carefully recording in his parish register the storms and bad winters that damaged his parsonage, Reverend Roberts of Rayleigh found himself reporting strangeness in the skies. On 22 April 1715, “there was a total eclipse of the Sun between nine and ten of the clock, and was visible here at Rayleigh, & when that glorious Luminary was obscured several stars appeared for some minutes.” Less than a year later, on 6 March 1716, “between seven & eight a clock in the evening were seen meteors or fiery Apparitions, which caused a Terror in the Beholding.” William Whiston’s pamphlet, pithily entitled *An Account of a Surprising Meteor Seen in the Air, March the 6th, 1715/16, at Night*, reports his experience of seeing the meteor over Archway in London. He vividly describes the meteor, and the effect of strange lights on the clouds, and goes on to say that the Northern Lights were seen over London at the same time. By 1715, the Age of Enlightenment was holding sway over many minds; even so, a meteor shower dancing through the heavens with the Northern Lights must have been amazing to see; no wonder it “caused a Terror in the Beholding”.

THE PECULIAR HAUNTING OF REVEREND MERRYWEATHER

Langenhoe is a village of buildings scattered along the road to Mersea Island. This ancient road boasts a 2,000-year-old Roman burial mound, and locals claim to have heard a metallic clanking as they have passed it, as if a sword had struck the shield of a ghostly Roman warrior. But from the late 1930s and on into the 1950s, strange reports came from Reverend Merryweather, who claimed that Langenhoe church was haunted.

All manner of phenomena were reported: full apparitions of robed figures passed through long bricked-up doorways; Gregorian chants filled the church when it was otherwise empty; snatched words from ancient conversations were overheard; candles behaved oddly; even the ghost of a man in a tweed suit was seen. The haunting extended beyond the church: in a nearby farmhouse, Merryweather claimed to have experienced an invisible woman’s embrace. Reverend John Cranmer Denning visited Merryweather and wrote *The Restless Spirits of Langenhoe: The Exciting True Story of a Haunted Essex Church*. As the Anglican clergy aren’t supposed to commune with the spirits, Denning has to spend part of the book justifying his interest in paranormal matters. It perhaps helped that the haunting of Borley Rectory (see FT229:31), 22 miles (35km) from Langenhoe,



ABOVE: The photo of Reverend Merryweather tucked into the pages of the Langenhoe parish register, along with a postcard showing the badly damaged church following the Essex earthquake of 1884. BELOW: An illustration showing the interior of the church, from *The Graphic*, 3 May 1884. Was the earthquake the cause of the 'haunting'?

was fresh in the minds of the Essex clergy: the Bishop of Colchester had had his hair parted by a levitating stone at Borley, so he was open to Merryweather's report of Langenhoe's ghosts.

Some of Merryweather's experiences can doubtless be explained away by the structural damage caused to the Norman church during the 1884 Colchester Earthquake. Virley's church, six miles (10km) from Langenhoe, was utterly destroyed by the quake, and the damage to Langenhoe's church would lead to its demolition in the 1960s. Cracks in the walls, both seen and unseen, would lead to draughts that blew out candles, and winds gusting through from different directions and at different speeds combining with varying air temperatures could well cause the auditory phenomena Merryweather experienced, particularly the ethereal Gregorian chanting. But how could it explain the visual phenomena? It depends on which theory of haunting one subscribes to, but perhaps the violent shaking of the earth had unsettled dormant memories within the stone-tape, or had reawakened slumbering spirits.

Not that this has much to do with parish registers, as Merryweather's notes on the haunting were kept in a diary. But he believed that the ghosts he encountered were connected with the Waldegrave family (relatives of this author) who were linked with the Borley haunting: at one point, they had owned the manor of Langenhoe.

Langenhoe's register covering 1792-1812 contains a photo of Merryweather tucked between the pages, as well as a postcard showing the earthquake damage suffered by the church. Added after a previous incumbent's careful cursive records of

Perhaps the violent shaking of the earth had reawakened slumbering spirits



baptisms and burials 100 years before, there are numerous notes in Merryweather's hand about the Waldegraves, including quotes from Paul Tabori's *Harry Price: Biography of a Ghost Hunter* and AC Henning's *Haunted Borley*. Henning was Borley's rector and had experienced ghostly phenomena too; he may even have been an acquaintance of Merryweather's.

Merryweather must have made these notes

during the haunting of Langenhoe; it is easy to picture him, like an MR James character, poring over books and parish records in the vestry of his haunted church, looking for an explanation for his uncanny experiences. And then, like so many others before him, whether writing about storms, earthquakes, polydactyl babies or a death caused by over-indulgence of gin, he recorded it in the pages of his parish register.

If you're able to read old handwriting (or happy to learn how), and keen to find parish register fortune tellers yourself, the FreeREG project (www.freereg.org.uk) is looking for volunteers to transcribe parish registers from across the UK.

NOTES

1 Background on Matthew Hopkins's involvement in witch trials comes from Malcolm Gaskill's brilliant *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-century English Tragedy* (London: John Murray, 2006); see also his article in **FT198:30-36**. On finding the family link between Hopkins and Edwards, I contacted Gaskill as he hadn't included it in his book. He explained that he had missed it when researching Hopkins, but that another historian, Frances Timbers, had spotted the Hopkins/Edwards connection. She mentions it in her article "Witches Sect or Prayer Meeting?: Matthew Hopkins revisited" in the *Women's History Review* (vol. 17, 2008, pp21-37).

♦ Helen Barrell is a librarian at the University of Birmingham. Her book *Poison Panic: Arsenic Deaths in 1840s Essex (inspired by notes about a murder in a parish register)* is published by Pen & Sword. You can find her at www.helenbarrell.co.uk and on Twitter @helenbarrell.

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Tatiana, 8 September

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

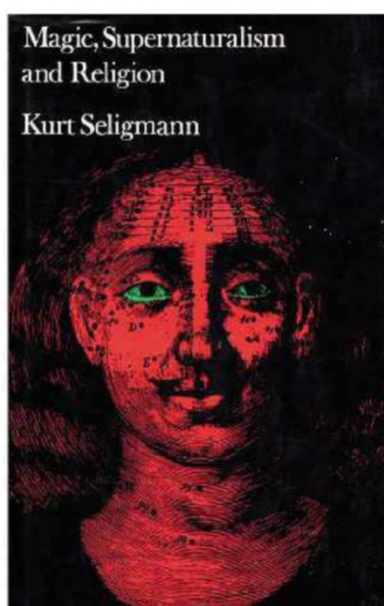
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

22. WORDS, SPELLS AND SILENCES

Defining what 'magic' is can be a tricky business. Apart from witnessing some highly accomplished stage magicians, i.e. conjurers, our own first acquaintance, in early youth, with the subject was with *Black Magic*, as retailed by Dennis Wheatley in *The Devil Rides Out* (1934), an entrancing classic of questionable fiction if ever there was one, and written in a suitably febrile fashion to boot. Actual magic, as opposed to skimpy excuses and implausible rituals designed to facilitate combat on the astral plane as well as monstrous orgies and mass shagging *al fresco*, is a rather more laborious affair than the likes of Wheatley would have one believe, but none the less interesting and provocative for all that.

Performing proper magic, whether for good or ill, requires dedication, erudition, and plain hard work. To do it safely the magician must protect himself within a circle or pentagram drawn upon the ground (or floor). Dr Faustus, renowned seller of his soul to Satan, fornicator with spirits, and subject of Kit Marlowe's finest play – you needn't bother with Goethe's dewy-eyed version – requires no less than this: "The circle... has to be cut out in sheet metal. With every stroke of the hammer, one has to pronounce: 'Made strong against all evil spirits and devils.' The triangle in the centre has to be formed by three chains taken from gibbets and nailed down with those nails that have gone through the forehead of executed criminals, who were broken upon the wheel, and other such horrors. Then the magician addresses himself to God with holy prayers... intermingled with exclamations: 'yn ge tu y ge se San mim to chu.'" Hard to find a criminal who's been broken on the wheel these days, never mind those nails. But one can't help noticing that if one's to deal with demons, one has to invoke the protection of God. Who, it is assumed, will duly provide same. So does God allow contact with demons on the grounds that He granted free will to mankind – and Devil take the hindmost – or does He in fact, for His own famously inscrutable reasons, approve of such intercourse? Magic is full of ambiguities like this.

Kurt Seligmann's *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* does pretty much what it says on the tin, although it doesn't have much to say about the supernatural and, apart from a few such quotations scattered throughout, is pretty thin on the practical business of magical



performances, potions and recipes. Even if it bears a more accurate title than its original *History of Magic*, it is a history nonetheless, starting with the Chaldeans and ending in the 18th century with an entertaining account of the Count St Germain – so no Fulcanelli, Golden Dawn and so on. Seligmann's initial thesis is that religion and magic were virtually indistinguishable. According to him, the Chaldean world is shot through with good and evil gods, perpetually at war, who must be propitiated through ritual and deflected by precaution. People are not in control of their world, and "man would have been the prey of chaos had he not employed magical arts to protect himself against evil influences." This is not so different from the essentially pagan outlook of the 'folk' in mediæval Europe.

(To argue with Seligmann would require erudition far in excess of his scarcely inconsiderable reading, and the consensus may have changed since 1948: so we report and comment on what we find, and no more.) Inevitably a clan or cabal of specialists grew up to deal with the situation, *viz.* a priesthood. By the time the ancient Egyptian religion had become formalised, the priests were keeping their secrets close, but gods and demons had come to be at their beck and call: "The Egyptian gods could be deceived, menaced and forced into obedience... The priests filled papyrus scrolls with magical formulas enabling the deceased to withstand his judges in the world beyond." Whether this combination of cajolery and threats worked for the living, Seligmann doesn't say.

Somewhere in between came Zoroaster, whose dualistic conception of the warring gods was crowned by a supergod: "This single power is Zrvan Akaran, boundless time, which rests in its glory, so incomprehensible to man that we can but honour it in awed silence." One is reminded of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH, in its Latin transliteration) the name of God that devout Jews never speak aloud, and Seligmann points to other parallels between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity – "the doctrines of angels and demons... of a new kingdom, the coming of a saviour, the belief in resurrection, a general judgement and a future life" are shared by all three. And so we pass to the ancient Hebrews and the gods they rejected but would occasionally return to, to the wrath of the Almighty. Among them is the Philistine fish-god, Dagon, who looks remarkably like one of Robert Temple's celebrated Nommo of the Dogon. With a name like that, how could he have missed her? Next stop on this magical mystery tour is Greece, whose Asclepian medicine was partly based on magic (in particular in healing through dream interpretation), as was the Eleusian mystery. But 'magic' could sometimes be the by-product of shrewd forethought. "Agathocles (361–289 BC) carried with him 'lucky owls', birds sacred to Pallas Athene, on a foolhardy expedition to Libya. And as his army

somewhat dejectedly took up its position for battle, he released the birds. The [little] owls perched on the shields and helmets of the soldiers, restoring courage to them.” Seligmann notes the notorious ambiguity of the Greek sybils and oracles – a characteristic, we wonder, that’s possibly not unrelated to the Greeks’ profound belief that one’s fate was unavoidable, as Oedipus – and his mother – painfully discovered.

Magic, we all know, depends on the power of words (‘Abracadabra!’) – some of them amounting to gibberish – for its efficacy. It also depends on silences. Silence is demanded of the names of certain gods, which itself imbues them with a magical quality, and silence is rigorously enforced upon bearers of the Eleusian secrets (“a matter of faith rather than of knowledge,” Seligmann believes), alchemical techniques and Masonic lore, while various codes, such as the infinitude belonging to Cabalism, are there to fox *hoi polloi* and when unravelled are to be kept in decent privacy among initiates. Agrippa von Nettheim went so far as to say: “Religion is the most mysterious thing, and about which one should keep silent, for Trismegistus says that it would be an offence to religion to confide it to the profane multitude.” So much for us rude unwashed mechanicals in the back pews, then: just chew yer bloody wafer and be grateful. And the Church was most concerned to suppress or at least discourage the publication of details of magical rites, potions and paraphernalia, lest anyone be inspired to try them (at risk of losing their souls to Satan, presumably). All this furtiveness could only lead to fascination with the forbidden, of course – the curse righteously visited upon all censors, and one likely reason why Dennis Wheatley’s books sold so well and people are still beguiled by that ghastly old polymorph Aleister Crowley.

Seligmann gives Satan an interesting if not exactly a good press. He observes that Old Nick is, in a sense, nobody, for he can assume any guise he likes in order to charm his chosen victims into wickedness. He may appear in such guises as a soldier, a demure maiden, a cat or a dragon. On the other hand, some say, he exudes a sulphurous body odour and is ugly. Something you may not have known: Cæserius of Heisterbach informed an astonished world that a demon had once confessed *Dorsa tamen non habemus* – “We have no bottoms.” If you should suspect your smooth-talking used-car salesman of being a demon, endeavour to observe (if you can – this is the tricky bit) his backside where, if he is a devil in disguise, instead of a bum you’ll find a human face. In this present period of unending elections, one is strangely



LEFT: Kurt Seligmann was also a Surrealist artist whose works, such as 1945’s *Sabbath Phantoms*, often reflected his magical interests.

“ONE MUST
ALWAYS BE
CAREFUL OF
BOOKS AND
WHAT IS IN
THEM, FOR
WORDS HAVE
THE POWER TO
CHANGE US.”

Cassandra Clare

reminded of ee cummings’s dictum, “a politician is an arse upon/which everyone has sat except a man”. Naturally, the incubus and succubus are devils, maybe even *the Devil*, and their offspring include the entire race of Huns. This perception lasted a long time, perhaps correctly.

We get long chapters on alchemy and alchemists – better treated, in our view, in Charles Mackay’s *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* [see FT345:50-51] – if, thankfully, without any of their arcane rambling – and a series of portraits of sundry Magi, most of whom are alchemists, astrologers or healers. Among them is Nostradamus, hardly a magical character, and about whom Seligmann is altogether too kind, ascribing some kind of credibility to his gnomish utterances, none of which make much sense as prophecies except in hindsight, and pretty dubiously even then. He gives the Cabala and its intricacies a decently detailed treatment, which implicitly shows that in a language where letters also serve as numbers, as in Hebrew, the combination makes almost any interpretation or ramification possible if enough obsessive-compulsives are let loose on it. “No wonder that the Cabalists, calculating words into numbers and numbers into words, discovered the

entire world organization, the names of angels and those of God, and the number of the heavenly hosts, which is 301,655,172.” Modern ‘Bible codes’ have some catching-up to do. One of the more bizarre things we learn is that by sundry manipulations it’s revealed that the “most mighty” name of God is 72 letters long, which might be even easier to leave unsaid

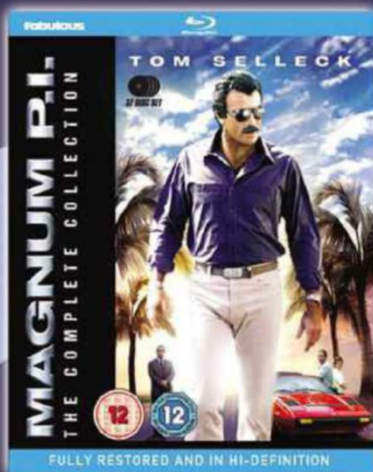
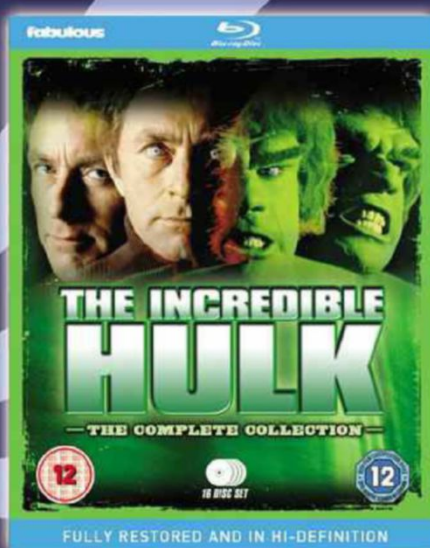
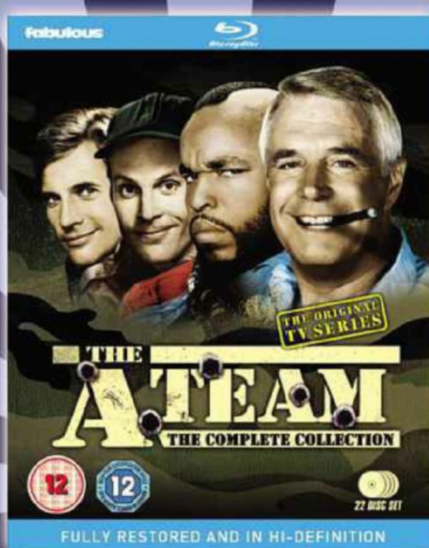
than the conventional Tetragrammaton. A kind of pantheism (and cf. Gnosticism) permeates the *Book Yetzirah*: “Unlike the Bible, [the book] tells us that God shaped the universe, not out of nothing but from Himself. Everything exists in Him; He is at the bottom of all things and all beings, which carry the symbols of His intelligence. The whole, God and the universe, is a perfect unity.” To the Cabalist, says Seligmann, “evil is not a separate force, but rather the scarcity or absence of [God’s] light.”

Seligmann gives a fairly comprehensive account of the witchcraft trials, observing acutely that the system was exploited by Church and State to suppress dissent of all kinds – “Wherever the voice of freedom was heard or an original idea was expressed the authorities detected the activities of Satan” – and magical practice was a great leveller: anyone with sufficient intelligence and perseverance could ponder the mysteries of nature, learn new languages, and become acquainted with ancient learning. Interestingly, there was no lack of lady alchemists in its early days. What greater threat to the established order could there be? And the persecution lasted so long because it had become an industry unto itself: calling a halt would put an awful lot of people out of work. In their desperation the witch-finders took wickedness into the realms of the preposterous: in the 17th century, the Inquisition “condemned to the stake a horse, whom his owner, an Englishman, had taught some tricks”.

We should have liked to say more about the lost art of divination by reading lines on foreheads and moles upon the face, and Rosicrucianism, but the end of the page approacheth. We’ll end by remarking that magic has always existed as an attempt, in one form or another, to beat the system – be that fate or poverty or ignorance. Whether it works is open to hard questions. But no wonder flabby bishops and plump potentates hated it.

Kurt Seligmann, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press 1971 (first published as *The History of Magic*, Pantheon Books 1948).

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Joshua Slocum's fortean voyage

PETER BROOKESMITH
finds some salty fortean
nuggets in a classic
account of seafaring...

Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World* is a classic of seafaring literature, and for good reason. It's stuffed with maritime adventures – hurricanes, doldrums, horse latitudes, braving it through the Straits of Magellan, hairy encounters with savages in canoes, sails shredding and booms jibing, to mention but a few. Slocum endured all this to become the first man to circumnavigate the globe solo. He covered over 46,000 miles (74,000km) at sea in the gaff-rigged sloop *Spray*, 39ft 9in (12m) in length, of just nine tons unladen, and which he had rebuilt himself virtually from scratch. The ship had no engine. Warned at Gibraltar of the dangers of pirates in the western Mediterranean, he decided to make his voyage east-west from there, against the prevailing winds.

Slocum's book has a natural attraction for me, son of a square-rigger seaman and, thanks to him, not unacquainted with offshore sailing myself. The old man went round Cape Horn four times: the sea was a dead flat calm on every occasion. Go round the Horn under sail, the old salts used to say, and you can piss fearlessly and unsullied off the weather side of a ship. He was never so injudicious as to put this fabled faculty to the test. (It's an acquired characteristic; it isn't heritable. I know. Fortunately the breeze was very light.) I mention this because Slocum implies he took the *Spray* round the Cape, but in fact did not.

Slocum's story is famous among forteans for his account of having been piloted through fierce seas by a ghost. But there

are other little mysteries in the book. Why he chose to sail single-handed around the world, he doesn't make quite clear, other than that he (along with many others) was finding work as a master mariner in short supply. One learns elsewhere that he was sending an account of his adventures home for magazine publication, and had surely publicised his intention before setting sail. But he doesn't tell us this.

Besides his ghostly helper, Slocum had one fortean experience and one non-experience. The latter occurred when he stopped at St Helena, Napoleon's *ultima thule*, and was put up in a famously haunted room by the governor (who alleged he had seen a spook or two there) in his residence. "I saw only furniture, and the horseshoe that was nailed over the door opposite my bed," reported Slocum. Quintessentially fortean, however, was the rain of blood, "the first of the kind in many years", that fell while Slocum was in harbour at Melbourne, Australia, in the (southern) summer of 1896–7. Ever the rugged pragmatist, he wastes no wonder on it: "The 'blood' came from a fine brick-dust matter afloat in the air from the deserts. A rainstorm setting in brought down this dust simply as mud; it fell in such quantities that a bucketful was collected from the sloop's awnings, which were spread at the time. ... Sailors no longer regard [such rains] with superstitious fear, but our credulous brothers on the land cry out: 'Rain of blood!' at the first splash of the awful mud." That rather puts landlubber



He was put up in a famously haunted room by the governor

Charles Fort in his place, what.

Worth noting too is Slocum's brief meeting with Paul Kruger, then President of the Transvaal. The interview was a bit of a disaster, as Slocum was introduced as "sailing round the world". "In the world," Kruger corrected him, and full of umbrage said no more. The world's most famous Boer was a convinced, lifelong Flat Earther.

One can't not mention the famous encounter with the pilot of the *Pinta* (he didn't give his name), one of Columbus's ships on his first transatlantic voyage. A couple of days southbound from the Azores, Slocum had partaken of white cheese and plums, and was seized by stomach cramps with night falling and a storm threatening. He double-reefed the mainsail, set the jib, and lashed the wheel. Properly set up, the *Spray* could sail forever with no

one at the helm. Slocum went below and became delirious. At some point in the night he came to, or thought he did, to find a heavy sea running and a tall piratical-looking character in a red hat at the helm. Slocum "wondered if he had come to cut my throat. ... 'Señor,' said he, doffing his cap, 'I have come to do you no harm.' And a smile, the faintest in the world, but still a smile, played on his face, which seemed not unkind when he spoke. 'I have sailed free,' he said, 'but was never worse than a *contrabandista*. I am one of Columbus's crew,' he continued. 'I am the pilot of the *Pinta* come to aid you. Lie quiet, *señor* captain,' he added, 'and I will guide your ship tonight. You have a *calentura* [fever] but you will be all right tomorrow.'" And he indicated that the *Pinta* was ahead, and they should overtake her. He then lectured Slocum on the folly of eating white cheese. Soon, the helpful helmsman burst into song, and Slocum forthrightly bade him be silent. Slocum finally regained consciousness to find the gale moderating and the *Spray* still going "like a racehorse", having covered 90 miles (145km) overnight. In his half-rational, post-delirium state, he "felt grateful to the old pilot, but I marvelled some that he had not taken in the jib." Next night the Spaniard appeared to him in a dream, remarking that: "I should like to be with you often on the voyage, for the love of adventure alone." This last is intriguing, for while Slocum doesn't report any further visits, he does remark that after braving a hurricane on the very last leg of his trip, as he was making for New York: "After this storm I saw the pilot of the *Pinta* no more." Hmm.

♦♦ PETER BROOKESMITH was the evil mastermind behind partwork *The Unexplained* and is the author of several books on ufology. He is a regular contributor to FT.

A darker shade of Dawson

GEORGE WHITE considers the forteen side of the much-loved funny man – from his weird fiction to his ghostly encounters

Mention the name Les Dawson to a member of the general public and they will think of a much-loved comedian and TV host who for 30 years entertained the nation with his piano playing, mother-in-law jokes and unique wit. What's less well known is that the great funny man was fascinated by the supernatural, and that this interest gave birth, in 1987, to his only serious work of fiction.

A Time Before Genesis was published that year by Elm Tree Books, described in the blurb as being “in the nightmarish tradition of James Herbert”. Despite being written by a ‘family’ television personality, the book is an astonishingly visceral apocalyptic pulp extravaganza, a delightfully schlocky and surprisingly bloody mash-up of various genres. There is indeed something of Herbert’s very British mix of sex and violence to be found in the book, along with hints of *Omen III: The Final Conflict* (1981) and an echo of the outrageous punch and Von Däniken-gone-wrong aesthetics of Larry Cohen’s 1970s films like *God Told Me To* and *The Visitor* – all set off by a sprinkling of Northern grit. The book is far from perfect. Structurally, it’s a mess, full of mismatched diary entries, newspaper cuttings and supposed archive material, assembled in a manner that suggests both Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Don Estelle’s autobiography, *Sing Lofty*, in its chronological uncertainty. However, there is something to be cherished in this peculiar literary effort.

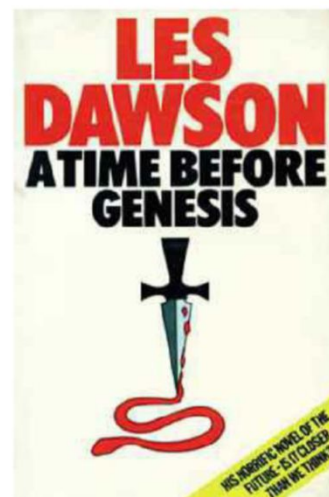


ABOVE: Les Dawson at home in 1977. OPPOSITE: The Empire Theatre, Liverpool, said to be haunted by Dawson's ghost.

The story begins in Dallas, 1963, with John F Kennedy arriving at the airport, “rich Texan earth catching the wheels of the mighty ship as it scared to a halt,” as Dawson’s lurid prose has it. From here, we follow David Gates, a disgraced Fleet Street journalist. He’s told by a CIA operative about a man called Roman, a mysterious White House advisor (“a queer, not a fag, just queer”) who doesn’t age and who killed Marilyn Monroe to spite Kennedy (because Roman, you see, is actually Nazi Martin Bormann). The CIA man is murdered, and Gates is offered a job on a local newspaper by his mentor John Mason. Gates and his family head north, where our hero starts work on the *Huddersfield Courier*.

All this takes place in a richly described and dystopian 1995, a gruesome world of state-owned banks and pubs, where hotels are now dorms and churches homeless shelters; religion is gone, King Charles and his family live in Canada,

It’s far from perfect, but there is something to be cherished in this peculiar literary effort



and the Pope has been exiled from a demolished Vatican by a Communist Italy. John Mason turns out to be a member of Winston Churchill’s secret Dennis Wheatley-advised “paranormal relations” cabinet, which has become a sort of league of good guys called ‘the Crusaders’. Along the way, Gates chases after a children’s book, *Fairies in the Garden* by HV Potter, which is for some reason being destroyed, while the likes of Count St Germain, Rasputin, Moses and Bormann are revealed as near-immortal evil-doers bent on causing disorder (the latter is revealed to be the real baddie behind Hitler’s reign, and the Führer actually quite a nice chap). JFK’s death, it turns out, was a direct result of his challenging Bormann/Roman. Meanwhile, the Marchments, an Aryan Satanist and his Eurasian lesbian wife, turn Gates’s wife Anna into a Sapphic she-devil and put his daughter Jayne’s decapitated head in the chest freezer.

Then we get an increasingly



deranged quest for a nun named Margaret Chatterton and a Tibetan monk's revelation that God is a cosmic life force in a crystal web and that the alien Old Ones (was Les a Lovecraft fan?) landed on Easter Island, drilled cross-continental subterranean tunnels and created a clone race of man-machines (or humans). Women are clone incubators and Middle-Eastern/East Asian people all come from the clone colony of Atlantis. We also learn that there were two advanced clones – Lucifer and his rival Jehovah – and that evil is rooted in karma and the love between men and women. Meanwhile, a Herod-style British government culls all disabled children and HV Potter turns out to be the father of Christ reborn, his books revealing the true location of Hell on Earth and the new Sodom: Glastonbury. One by one, the Crusaders are murdered and mutilated, resulting in a massive battle at the now-boarded up BBC TV Centre (the national media have shut down), while mass sex kicks off in Hyde Park before humanity reboots itself...

The book is a classic exploitation concept writ large, the kind of stuff that Christian horror writers would hammer to death 15 years later, but Dawson's style, with its distinctly lurid prose, lifts this well above myriad instalments of *Left Behind*. And its ideas – a cabal of elderly men from all over the globe (African-American civil rights activists, reluctant Nazis, blacklisted Hollywood types) gathering in Huddersfield, secret codes hidden in sub-Enid Blyton children's books, mass teenage suicides caused by a bullying, slimming-obsessed media – are a mix of the pleasingly absurd and the spookily prophetic. We get hints of the fuss over the supposed 'Satanic' writings of JK Rowling (note the use of the name Potter, though presumably a reference to Beatrix rather than Harry) and cyber-bullying. Dawson seems to revel in descriptions of gore and mutilation, particularly in the scenes of the resurrected Satanic pilot, Farrow, doused in fuel



and melting in the flames. The character of David Gates seems at times to be an avatar for Dawson himself. One wonders whether he envisaged a possible movie or TV adaptation of his book. I can imagine a British TV mini-series with David Warner as Gates, Charles Durning as the CIA man, Peter Cushing and John Mills as Mason and Torrance of the Crusaders, Earl Cameron as the elderly black activist and Malcolm McDowell as Roman. Such fantasy casting is testament to the vividness of the story, even though it does get hard to follow towards the end.

It's a shame the book appears to be so hard to come by. It seems never to have had a paperback release, and copies go for at least £30 online. It deserves to be republished so people can discover this other, darker side of Dawson. He did write several semi-fictional and humorous books, including a fictionalised autobiography, but his only other attempt at relatively straight fiction was an unfinished sub-Barbara Cartland bodice-ripper penned under the pseudonym of 'Maria Brett Cooper', which featured a subplot about cursed gold from the Civil War. Apparently, writing was Dawson's first love, and one wonders what other books might have been forthcoming had he not died in 1993 at the age of just 62.

However, this was not his first brush with the fortaean world. According to various friends and family members, Dawson was interested from an early age in metaphysics, philosophy and

the paranormal. According to some sources, he even claimed to be psychic. Louis Barfe's biography of Dawson recounts the story of how, in 1972, the Bury bungalow Les lived in with his family was haunted by a spectre in 18th century dress called the Grey Lady; her presence was discovered when his daughter, Julie, then four years old, was found speaking to the wall.

But the most famous story about Dawson and the supernatural comes from 1989, when he was playing in the pantomime *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Sunderland Empire. Dawson had experienced some sinister premonitions, but being a professional, accepted the gig; it was while in his dressing room that he heard a familiar laugh and saw in his mirror the ghost of fellow comic legend Sid James, who had died in the same dressing room in 1976. According to Tom Slemen, author of the *Haunted Liverpool* series and collector of a number of uncanny tales concerning Dawson, James's spectre "looked 'ghastly'. He wore some type of white shroud, and there was an aroma of whisky hanging in the air. The apparition's face was pale and clammy-looking, and the eyes were almost black and lifeless. The ghost shouted something (which I will never put into print) then vanished. Dawson almost died from shock and vowed he'd never work again at the Sunderland Empire – and he never did."¹

This wasn't Dawson's first experience of a haunted theatre.

In 1980, while appearing in *Babes in the Wood* at the Liverpool Empire, he was alone in his dressing room when he saw a tiny, disembodied child's index finger trace the number 13 on a mirror, followed by the sound of a little girl singing 'Ring a Ring o' Roses' as she skipped past him. Slemen writes that: "Dawson was naturally unnerved by the ghostly girl (who has haunted the Empire for around a century) and he had a bad feeling about the number 13; he wondered if it meant 13 years of life left". Spookily enough, Les Dawson did die 13 years later – not that this ended his public appearances. His ghost has been spotted at the Liverpool Empire and various other clubs and venues where he worked, such as Yorkshire TV Studios in Kirkstall Road, Leeds, and the Albert Dock, where Granada TV's Liverpool offices were located. Tom Slemen recounts a story of several tourists near the dockside Pumphouse pub seeing Dawson in 2003, a decade after the comic had died of a heart attack, with one female tourist even asking the spectral comedian for an autograph, until her husband reminded her that Dawson was dead. They walked away, believing the portly figure to be an imposter or tribute act, and the portly figure apparently vanished into thin air. Slemen adds that he "was besieged with emails and telephone calls at BBC Radio Merseyside regarding this incident, but I was unable to explain the haunting because of the tenuous links Dawson had with the city, and I am still unable to explain the paranormal occurrence to this day."

Ironically, Dawson's 'ghost' would later appear on television, 20 years after his death, when a holographic figure of the comedian was created for the 2013 ITV special *An Audience that Never Was*.

¹ www.slemen.com/sidjamesghost.html

♦ ♦ GEORGE WHITE is a struggling writer and videogame designer. You can find him at allnewbritishrubbish.blogspot.com

Hue and Cree on Hankley Common

A series of wigwams appearing on a Surrey heath was a prelude to a savage murder with echoes of the Wild West. **CATHI UNSWORTH** turns back the clock to 1942 and a strange case that was to prove a landmark in forensic history

Hankley Common, near Godalming in Surrey, is the home of one of Britain's most popular golf courses, an 18-hole range surrounded by heathland designated a Site of Specific Scientific Interest for its unusual plant life. It's a tranquil haven of heather and silver birch that belies the sinister events of 75 years ago when, in the middle of World War II, a crime was committed here that seemed like something from the Wild West – the Wigwam Murder.

The Army had commandeered the Common. Bulldozers cleared a site for tanks to practise manoeuvres, pushing up 20ft-high mounds of earth to simulate the terrain of a battlefield. On the morning of Wednesday, 7 October 1942, one of these mock battles was in full flight, and for Marine William Moore the scenario was about to become a bit too realistic. As he crawled past one of these piles of earth, he brushed into the outstretched arm of a dead body.¹

Summoned by Moore's CO, Lieutenant Norman McLeod, Godalming's Chief Superintendent Richard Webb arrived on the scene at four pm. Having inspected the site, he cordoned off the area and called in Chief Inspector Edward Greeno from Scotland Yard, Dr Eric Gardner of the Surrey County Coroner's office and the Metropolitan Police's Forensic

Pathologist Dr Keith Simpson. All duly assembled the next morning at the impromptu burial ground.

Dr Simpson's assistant, Molly Lefebure,² described a desolate, rainswept scene on top of a ridge, where the two pathologists began to dig around the protruding limb and she collected insect and plant samples while mortar shells whistled overhead. Gradually, they exposed the body of a young woman; she had gone to her death in a green and white dress, light underwear, ankle socks and the headscarf now wrapped around her neck. Her shoes were missing and her skull had disintegrated, leaving only a tuft of bleached blonde hair.

The remains were transported to Simpson's base at Guy's Hospital in London, to be cleansed in carbolic acid, while Greeno organised a dragnet of 60 police to search the Common. Their reconnaissance yielded bone and teeth fragments, from which the two pathologists reconstructed the woman's skull.

They deduced she had been stabbed several times on the left side of her head, wounds echoed

by those found on her right arm and hand that had been incurred in a futile attempt to ward off her attacker. These had not been made by any blade the men had ever encountered before, but by a knife with a pointed hook resembling a parrot's beak.

The woman had fallen on her face, knocking out her front teeth, after which she received a single, heavy blow on the back of her head that would have killed her instantly. Injuries on her right leg had occurred post-mortem, when her corpse had been dragged through the heathland to the place of her burial. The growth of heather on top of this spot told the pathologists she had lain there for about a month.

Joan had scribbled on the walls pictures of wild roses and Biblical texts

Greeno's team unearthed more pivotal evidence. A heavy birch bough, sharpened at both ends, with several strands of blonde hair stuck in the bark, left approximately 350 yards from the shallow grave and 16 yards away from a military tripwire. Dr Simpson matched it precisely to the cavity in the murdered woman's skull. Only 50 yards distant, in a dell above the tripwire, were the missing shoes.

In the immediate vicinity of the crime scene was Jasper Camp, where Canadian soldiers trained for three months before being transferred to other arenas. Now that America had joined the war, there were also transient US troops, as well as the British doing their training. Greeno estimated he had about 100,000 possible suspects, most of whom had likely left for faraway battlefields in the time since the murder.³

But he got a valuable tip-off from a local PC, Tim Halloran. He remembered a curious couple, a bleached-blond teenager who wore a crucifix and spoke in a more refined manner than her down-at-heel appearance



ABOVE: Hankley Common, "a tranquil haven of heather and silver birch that belies the sinister events of 75 years ago".

GILLIAN PULLINGER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



would have suggested; and her boyfriend, who resembled a 'Red Indian' and had built them a wigwam home on the Common from birch saplings, heather and bracken. Halloran had arrested them for vagrancy two months previously and their names were still in his book: Joan Pearl Wolfe and Private August Sangret of the Regina Rifles, stationed at Jasper Camp.

Sangret's CO confirmed that he had once arrested Sangret for building wigwams and that soldier had spoken of marrying a local girl named Joan Pearl Wolfe. His course was due to end in two weeks' time and he had qualified for a fortnight's leave. The body on the Common had yet to be formally identified and details of the murder investigation had been suppressed to try and prevent the perpetrator from fleeing. Greeno had one chance to interview Sangret before his pay parade on 12 October. Before he was called in, the Provost Sergeant observed the private ducking into the shower-room.

Sangret was half French Canadian, half Cree Indian, born in Battleford, Saskatchewan, in 1913. His childhood was dirt poor and he never went to school, though he spoke English and Cree fluently and had learned the traditional skills of his ancestors as a youth.⁴ Greeno was as impressed by Sangret's physique as he was by the private's recall of the dates of his arrival in England, transfer to Jasper Camp and first meeting with Joan. The Chief Inspector took him for a walk across the Common, where Sangret showed him the sites of his wigwams and a cricket pavilion where the couple had later set up home. Joan had scribbled on the walls: pictures of wild roses, Biblical texts and the address of her mother in Kent.

Meanwhile, back at Jasper Camp, Sangret's kit was inspected and one of his blankets found to have traces of blood on it. Greeno took it back to Guy's, where Dr Simpson matched the formation of the stains to the wounds on the body.

With only 24 hours left to charge their suspect, police recovered from the Common a



ABOVE: Private August Sangret and his victim, Joan Pearl Wolfe.

purse, an elephant charm and an Identity Card so soiled it was sent to Scotland Yard for forensic reconstruction. The crucifix that PC Halloran recalled Joan wearing was found snagged on a branch. While the ID card went through the lab, the CI journeyed to Tunbridge Wells to show the charm to Joan's mother Edith, who said she had bought the item herself. Joan was the eldest of three children born to Edith and her husband Charles, an apparent eccentric who gassed himself when Joan was only seven. Sent to convent school, Joan began running away at the age of 16, when she was engaged to a local man, a marriage she called off in favour of an itinerant lifestyle and a string of affairs with soldiers. At the time of her murder, she had lived apart from her mother for two years.

She had been engaged to another Canadian soldier, Francis Hearn, who promised to marry her only after he knew he was going to be posted back home. Jilted Joan met Sangret the day after Hearn's departure, on 17 July 1942, at a pub in Godalming. He built their first wigwam, where she lived on bread, lemonade and pork pies, reading the Bible and awaiting his nightly visits, until Military Police found them on 20 August.

A second Cree love nest was erected and subsequently busted a few days later, when Joan was taken to hospital, from where she wrote her lover letters, telling him she was pregnant and asking him to marry her. After being

discharged, she moved into the pavilion and began knitting baby clothes.

Sangret told Greeno he had last seen his lover on Monday 12 September, when he found the pavilion deserted. His statement, at 17,000 words, was the longest the CI had ever taken in a murder case. When it was finished, he showed his suspect the crucifix that had been found on the Common and Joan's shoes.

"I guess you have found her," Sangret said. "I guess I will get the blame."

But by then Greeno had already detained Sangret for longer than he was legally allowed. Without the murder weapon, the CI was powerless to charge his suspect or stop him taking his leave.

It wasn't until Monday 27 November that the Provost Sergeant from Jasper Camp found, hidden in a waste pipe in the shower room Sangret had visited just prior to his police interview, a jack-knife with a strangely hooked point, filed down to resemble a parrot's beak. The MP who found Joan and Sangret in their wigwam on August 20 and the Provost Corporal at Jasper Camp both recalled having seen Sangret with it. Dr Simpson confirmed it as the murder weapon.

The investigators could now form a clear picture of Joan's last night. The couple had quarrelled at the dell, probably over marriage, and he attacked her with his knife. Fleeing in terror, Joan ran down the hillside but fell over the tripwire, smashing

her teeth. As she lay dazed, Sangret finished her off with a devastating blow from the birch bough. He rolled her up in his army blanket and dragged her to the top of the ridge to bury her, in what Molly Lefebure speculated was an unconscious echo of the rituals of his ancestors, "who always buried their vanquished enemies upon a height".

Greeno tracked Sangret to his subsequent posting in Aldershot and charged him on 16 December. The trial was held at Kingston Assizes on 24 February 1943. Dr Simpson presented the reconstructed skull as evidence, the first time such an exhibit had been produced at a trial. The jury found Sangret guilty, with a recommendation for mercy that was turned down on appeal by the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison.

The wild man of Hankley Common was hanged by Albert Pierrepoint at 9am on 29 April 1943. Conducting his autopsy, Dr Simpson found Joan Pearl's name tattooed on her lover's arm. Whether she had been pregnant with his child at the time he killed her had been impossible to ascertain.⁵

NOTES

1 *The Wigwam Murder*, MJ Trow, Constable, 1995.

2 *Murder on the Home Front*, Molly Lefebure, Heinemann, 1954.

3 *War on the Underworld*, Edward Greeno, John Long Publishing, 1960.

4 *The Milwaukee Sentinel* 16 May 1943

5 The case has been dramatised several times, first as *The Case of the Hunted Hunter* in the radio series *Secrets of Scotland Yard* in 1950, then as *The Brass Button* in the radio series *The Black Museum* in 1952 and more recently in the *Strange Weapons* episode of Discovery Channel's *Crime Museum UK* in 2014 and in the BBC's *Catching Criminals History* episode *Instruments of Murder* in 2015. Crime writer MJ Trow is the author of a full-length non-fiction account of the case, *The Wigwam Murder*, in which he argues Sangret's innocence.

◆ CATHI UNSWORTH is the author of five pop-cultural crime novels that specialise in the recreation of forgotten history. Her latest, *Without The Moon (Serpent's Tail)* features the case of the *Blackout Ripper* that was also solved by Inspector Edward Greeno.

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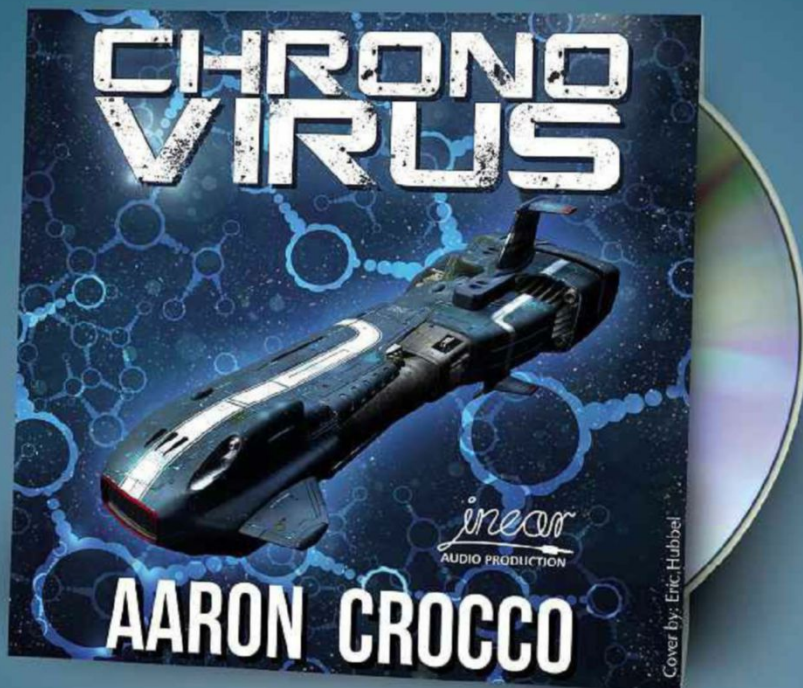
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A matter of life and reincarnation

Astonishing – and well documented – modern cases of reincarnation and communicating with the dead may push against your boggle threshold, but the debunkers don't have all the best tunes

Surviving Death

A Journalist Investigates Evidence for an Afterlife

Leslie Kean

Crown Archetype 2017

Hb, 407pp, illus, bib, ind, \$27, ISBN 9780553419610

Surviving Death has the distinction of being the only nonfiction book I have read in which somebody I knew in life speaks from beyond the grave – twice: once through a Long Island medium, the other time through an Irish one. Neither knew the individual, who had been a firm materialist and sceptic of such matters. Leslie Kean (rhymes with 'cane') goes to some length to argue for the psychics' demonstrated honesty and credibility. She cites items they could not have been gleaned from any public record, including the contents of a private conversation Kean (who was romantically involved with him) had with the dying man.

The alleged communicator speaks and behaves in the way true to his uniquely oversized, egocentric personality, so much so that I put the book down with feelings both rattled and ambivalent. What if my old friend is more than just a fond memory? The thought rendered the concept of "afterlife" disconcertingly immediate. It also undermined the singular comfort we experience in grief. Could it be that, really, we want the dead to stay dead?

Though my usual reading interests don't run to parapsychology and psychical research, life circumstances (e.g., as onetime *Fate* editor) have led me to a certain familiarity with the literature. Thus, inevitably some, albeit not a whole lot, of *Surviving Death*, particularly

the historical material, visits territory already trodden by those who have followed the path. Even before I read it, I had a good idea of how I'd respond: as a philosophical (and theological) agnostic, I hover between a reflexive scepticism about survival and a gnawing, uneasy sense that some of the data culled over more than a century of empirical inquiry are indeed confounding, even as the counter-explanations marketed by the debunking industry are often numbingly unconvincing.

Surviving Death, which will give any thoughtful reader much to mull over, is surely the finest popular book on the subject since Deborah Blum's *Ghost Hunters* (2006). Since Blum's focus is on William James and the early decades of the Society for Psychical Research, *Surviving* functions as something like a sequel, taking the story up to the present and extending the coverage beyond apparitions and mediums to near-death experiences and ostensible past-life memories. The bulk of the book reviews the contemporary efforts of medical and psychological professionals to document relevant evidence. Elsewhere, Kean imparts her own interactions with experiencers, witnesses, and psychics.

To all of this, she brings a commendable level-headedness, and an awareness of what it takes to make the case. For reasons she argues clearly though she never expresses it quite this way, only an ultimately self-defeating rejection on principle, specifics be damned, will stop the reader from conceding that, whatever their ultimate meaning, these experiences almost certainly defy current knowledge. For the only imaginable alternative,

"Anomalies often turn out to be slippery things, their true nature concealed"

Kean sometimes drags in the hoary notion of "super psi," if not necessarily to endorse it, simply to advance it as the only conceivable alternative. Still, super psi is a shakily hypothetical construct on its best days.

For all I know, there may be another alternative to the survivalist reading. After all, many extraordinary anomalies seem not to be what they appear, which doesn't mean they are not actually fantastic phenomena. Anomalies often turn out to be slippery things, their true nature concealed by an impenetrable mask. Who knows if that's the case here? If one needs something in place of survival, perhaps we ought to consider only that it may be unknown, and possibly unimaginable, at this cultural moment.

As one reads the book, one reflects that studies of consciousness and ostensible afterlife occurrences have received more concentrated, sophisticated scientific scrutiny than just about any other category of anomalous experience. At the forefront of such research are physicians, medical scientists, and psychologists who have tested and apparently eliminated the standard prosaic claims – prominently that the experiencers are not "really" dead and their brains are still functioning – about the

neurological causes of deathbed visions.

Surviving opens with jaw-dropping yet impressively documented modern reincarnation cases. One concerns a boy's apparently inexplicable memories of combat death as an American pilot in World War II, another a child's recall of the career of a highly obscure early Hollywood figure. Other chapters survey evidence from mediumship, including wave monitoring which (according to the Tucson-based Windbridge Institute) finds that "the experience of communicating with the deceased may be a distinct mental state that is not consistent with brain activity during ordinary thinking or imagination." A later chapter relates an especially astonishing experience of Kean's, akin to a very hard-to-believe 19th-century account of a materialisation engineered by a physical medium. More than any other moment in a book full of spectacular marvels, here I found myself pressing up against the boggle threshold. Other readers will have their own.

Though Kean is responsible for most of the book's content, occasional chapters are given over to scientifically trained specialists who outline their own methodologies and conclusions. These include University of Virginia psychiatrist Jim Tucker (who took charge of past-life studies after his pioneering colleague Ian Stevenson died in 2007), cardiologist Pim van Lommel, pharmacologist Julie Beischel, and others. None will come across to any fair-minded person as a flake or a fool, even

Continued on page 56

UFO dystopia

Cold War anxieties are still being worked out, as this study of ufological 'fake news' shows

The UFO Dossier

100 Years of Government Secrets, Conspiracies & Cover-Ups

Kevin D Randle

Visible Ink 2016

Pb, 413pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$19.95, ISBN 9781578595648

The idea that some national governments have taken an interest in what we might call UFO-like phenomena is old hat. It may have begun in the simple but ancient prerogative of guarding our territory against unlawful intrusion, but then two things happened in the mid-1940s to complicate matters: science fiction introduced into popular culture the idea of invasion by technologically superior extraterrestrials; then the era of the Cold War between Russia and the Western Allies ramped up the general paranoia, creating a fertile compost in which such tropes as mind control and other 'black ops', reverse engineering of crashed saucers, covert surveillance and the 'silencing' of witnesses, and the whole alien hybrid and abduction canon, could flourish.

In this perfect storm of suspicion and bewilderment, 'official sources' (which might normally be relied upon for facts and truth) deliberately, or as some suspect 'by design', lost their reliability and transparency, by resorting to redacting, suppressing, or ridiculing any mention of such things. On their side, whatever confidence and trust the military, intelligence and security establishment ever had in the general public was quickly eroded. It was as if the public had become an 'enemy', or at least something that could not be trusted. If America were a person, we'd be talking about a psychological fragmentation;

you only have to consider the proliferation of literature and movies about dystopias and conspiracy theories to realise that the effects of this general anxiety are still working out.

Who can we turn to for reliable insight into this chaotic (but very modern) mythology? You could do much worse than trust Kevin Randle. With his US Army and Air Force experience, and with degrees in psychology and military science, and more than half his life spent in detailed investigation of UFO incidents and interviewing key witnesses and colleagues, he is an ideal guide. He sets out the issues clearly, homing in on verifiable facts as he hacks through seven decades' worth of 'fake news' (the surfeit of lies, rumours, disinformation and misinterpretation).

He opens with a valuable critical essay on the history of 'official' UFO investigations in the USA; the remaining nine detailed sections include astronomical objects perceived as UFOs; photographic evidence; five major incidents in November 1957; injuries 'caused by' UFOs; groups of lights in the sky; the role of scientists in investigations and reports; official reports from other countries; an analysis of the official French COMETA Report of 1999; and a survey of how the UFO phenomenon has changed as it continues into the 21st century. This latter section includes a careful analysis of the many 'unofficial' catalogues of sightings and humanoid encounters compiled by veteran ufologists for their colleagues.

Recommended as an up-to-date overview of a very convoluted subject.

Bob Rickard



Continued from previous page

as the implications of their work could hardly be more profound for all of us, for whom the questions will be answered one day.

Jerome Clark



The Phoenix

An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast

Joseph Nigg

University of Chicago 2016

Pb, 416pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$35.00, ISBN 9780226195490

In *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast*, Joseph Nigg provides an ambitious and painstakingly researched volume that maps the indeterminate sources of the mythological bird that first appeared in ancient times and whose symbolism remains prevalent to this day, charting the development of the phoenix as symbol from its roots in ancient Egyptian myth to its eventual accumulation of characteristics from vastly different cultures, regions, and historical epochs.

As promulgated by a cult at Heliopolis, the world began when Ra assumed the appearance of the Bennu, a solar bird, a possible inspiration for the phoenix, whose initial cry initiated time. The bird later reappears as the phoenix in ancient Greek texts, most notably Hesiod and Herodotus, and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is reworked into a pagan symbol of regeneration. During the early Christian era, the phoenix frequently appears in various bestiaries, and in *De ave phœnice*, the "Christian Cicero" Lactantius's startlingly beautiful Latin 170-line poem, is delicately transmuted into a Christian symbol of death's transcendence through divine intervention.

Regrettably, Nigg stumbles in his rather injudicious discussions of the use of the phoenix in literary works from Lactantius to Shakespeare's *The Phoenix and the Tortoise* to the metaphysical poets of the 17th century and more modern literary practitioners such as American poet Robert Pinsky and *Harry Potter* author J K Rowling, the limitations of which betray Nigg's negligible gifts for literary analysis.

Of greater interest to fortune tellers is, thankfully, an altogether illuminating analysis of the often

overlooked use of the phoenix as a descriptive symbol in the final, spiritual stage of the alchemical process, namely the transmutation of the soul.

While Nigg, a retired professor and author of the immaculately illustrated *Sea Monsters* (University of Chicago 2013), an exploration of Olaus Magnus's mysterious 16th century map the Carta Marina, is to be commended for bringing to popular attention many wonderfully obscure texts, some familiar only to scholars, *The Phoenix*, like his earlier *Sea Monsters*, is more compilation than in-depth study. Textual analysis and critical insight are decidedly not Nigg's métier; frequent errors in dates and translation further frustrate Nigg's work as a credible resource for scholars. Moreover, Nigg has no central story to tell, further diminishing the text's readability. However, if comprehensiveness is a sole criterion for excellence, than Nigg more than makes up for these rather unfortunate limitations; one suspects that deep analysis of the many entries, however articulate or well-researched, in a book that covers the expanse of pre-history to modern times, would require many thousands more pages.

As it stands, *The Phoenix* is an enlightening yet ultimately flawed compendium of knowledge concerning this fascinating, often mystical, mythological symbol.

Eric Hoffman



Hitler's Monsters

A Supernatural History of the Third Reich

Eric Kurlander

Yale University Press 2017

Pb, 406pp, ind, bib, £25.00/\$35.00, ISBN 9780300189452

No regime in history invites as many connections to the occult and paranormal as Nazi Germany. In general, though, academic histories tend to give the Nazi relationship with the supernatural relatively little attention. Non-academic historians enthusiastically propound Nazi connections to the occult or "border science," while most academic historians tend to treat the supernatural



as a source of metaphor or a personal fixation of leaders like Himmler or Rudolf Hess. Eric Kurlander, however, contends that while the Third Reich cannot be explained away as some kind of occult conspiracy, the “supernatural imaginary” is a vital part of understanding not only the Nazi world view but the way in which Hitler was able to succeed in winning over German voters. “No mass political movement,” he argues, “drew as consciously or consistently as the Nazis on... the ‘supernatural imaginary’ – occultism and ‘border science,’ pagan, New Age, and Eastern religions, folklore, mythology and many other supernatural doctrines...”.

Hitler's Monsters is divided into three parts. The first focuses on the background of folklore, occultism and border science in Germany and Austria in the decades before the rise of the Nazis. Kurlander explores the wide range of different German Romantic, occult and border science movements that created a supernatural milieu for the Nazis, with particular attention paid to the Thule Society and its influence. These influences created a Nazi supernatural imaginary that drew on these different influences but didn't correspond exactly to any of them. This resulted in an accessible set of myths and symbols that helped the Nazis politically. This section also deals with the role of supernatural imagery and themes in Nazi propaganda.

In the second part, Kurlander addresses the role of the supernatural in Nazi policy between 1933 and the beginning of the war. Once in power, the Nazis could either implement the agenda implied by their supernatural beliefs or abandon it as a now-superfluous electoral strategy. Kurlander argues that they did the former, and that relatively isolated incidents of the Nazi regime suppressing occultists or border science had more to do with policing ideological opposition than with any concerted

policy against their former esoteric allies. This section also discusses Nazi patronage of border science (Kurlander avoids the terms “fringe science” or “pseudoscience”) as well as the quest to develop a Nazi alternative to established religious beliefs.

The final section deals with Nazism and the supernatural during the war itself. Kurlander covers the German fascination with border science “miracle weapons” as well as the role of unorthodox scientific theories in Nazi racial policy, including mass murder and human experimentation. Ethnology, archaeology and folklore all also played a role in justifying Germany's imperial ambitions in Eastern Europe.

Thorough, detailed and informative, *Hitler's Monsters* is a fascinating guide to the role that supernatural beliefs played in the rise and rule of the Nazi party. It deals dispassionately with the topic, discussing these ideas and their importance in great detail without either dismissing them or descending into sensational conspiracy theory. In fact, Kurlander makes an excellent case for the partial, eclectic and opportunistic nature of Nazi engagement with the supernatural – just as with science, conventional politics, economics and other areas of thought, the Nazis blended elements of disparate beliefs into a mixture that served their ideological goals.

Hitler's Monsters is ultimately a work of academic history, and there are parts of the text where Kurlander engages with controversies most lay readers won't be familiar with (although these are always clearly explained). In general, though, it's clear and easy to read, although densely packed with information. Any reader interested in the real role played by the supernatural in the rise, rule and ruin of Nazi Germany will want to explore Kurlander's book.

James Holloway



Gayer-Anderson

The Life and Afterlife of the Irish Pasha

Louise Foxcroft

Unbound 2016

Hb, 248pp, illus, bib, ind, £30.00, ISBN9671783523658

If the name Gayer-Anderson is familiar, it is probably because of the eponymous cat in the British Museum. In addition to being a noted Egyptologist, ‘Pum’ Gayer-Anderson (1881–1945) was a poet, psychic, soldier, surgeon, Arabist, and admirer and mentor of perfect young boys. His childhood was spent trailing across America with a brutal father, submissive mother and his siblings, including the identical twin with whom he had a telepathic relationship. Despite minimal education, he got into Guy's Hospital to study medicine and became a surgeon, which he regarded as a route to freedom.

Pum's first trip to Egypt and Sudan was the start of a life-long Orientalist passion. He boiled Nubians' heads to provide skulls for research institutes and cash for himself, deadened to the horror by opium. He shot crocodiles, which the locals regarded as sacred, dissected snakes and researched sleeping sickness. His acknowledged “emotional paralysis” dominated his public life, but his time in Cairo enabled him to build a “private, surreal inner life”. He was a living embodiment of the dissonance between a louche East and repressed late Victorian West, but his discretion allowed him to hide his sexual adventures in the hammams. Pum's collecting (he became a recognised expert of Egyptian antiquities) and his “psychic adventures” merged, and he felt an apprehension or delight in handling objects. He ‘dreamed’ of finds and ‘felt’ if objects were *khazook* or genuine. As an adult, he mourned the “pristine intuition” of adolescents experiencing poltergeists. ‘Fate’ drew him to the house that became the museum named after him.

This biography is laugh-out-loud funny, touching and fascinating.

Val Stevenson



In Fairyland

The World of Tessa Farmer

Ed: Catriona McAra

Strange Attractor Press 2016

Pb, 128pp, illus, plates, notes, £14.99, ISBN 978190722375

Tessa Farmer's fairies are visceral predators of tooth and claw, in some ways far from the courtly manners of the delicate Victorian flower fairies, or the etiquette obsessed good neighbours of folklore.

In Fairyland: The World of Tessa Farmer is a perfect example of how to put together a collection of essays about a single subject. The strength is in the variety of discussions included. Essays explore fairy art, the natural history of Farmer's skeletal fairies, and the relationship between her work and that of her great-grandfather Arthur Machen. This is a book that will appeal to many fortunes, whether interested in cryptids, British taxidermy traditions, the representation of the invisible world, or contemporary treatments of folkloric topics in art.

The book is well illustrated with good quality colour plates. These struggle a little to convey the scale of Farmer's work. This is down to her installations being so complex in their execution rather than an issue with the photographs. They do manage to display the nature of her skeletal charges in a way that complements the text.

My favourite essays are those exploring the insect-like character of the fairies in Farmer's work. Gavin R Broad's study of their natural history is nuanced and developed, as is Petra Lange-Berndt's exploration of their swarming nature.

These are just my personal highlights. There isn't a weak chapter here, and I would highly recommend *In Fairyland* to anyone with an interest in what might be flitting past the corner of their eye.

Steve Toase



A theory of everything...

An archæological flight of fancy that includes historical howlers and bizarrely precise measurements proves almost impossible to grasp

400,000 Years of Stone Age Science

The Long Journey – How a Stone Age Map Changed the World

Derek Cunningham

Createspace 2015

Pb, 359p, ISBN 9781508422129

Few books genuinely have the capacity to make this reader gasp for air, but this one managed it. Twice. Early on, in the introductory chapters and when discussing 'Sir' Geoffrey of Anjou, Cunningham states that Henry I of England's "daughter Matilda, whom was then married to Pope Henry V" (p41). Despite mediæval popes and Holy Roman emperors often believing themselves to be the other, this historical (and grammatical) confusion by a Scottish genealogist is unexpectedly disturbing. Surely everyone knows mediæval popes had a game go at everything but marriage (and Morris dancing). However, this was as nothing compared to the first mention of Shangri-La (p171).

But take a deep breath, centre yourself, perhaps enjoy another mushroom and ask why should not the mythical Atlantis be joined by a pan-global leyline to Shangri-La? Future editions also might include Lilliput and Erewhon, and surely they should also plot the mighty St Andrews leyline cross, centred on the Bay of Tonkin.

For Cunningham, like Plato, Atlantis lies far to the west of the Pillars of Hercules, indeed, way out west of La La Land itself, being sited on the southeast coast of China, sunken and lost in black manganese oxide/hydroxide-rich sediments. Ironically, it seems these same globally 'scarce' black pigments (in the



real world manganese oxides/hydroxides are almost as common as natural rust (ie are everywhere) were needed in Old Stone Age cave paintings, themselves a cyphered map for global travelling Palæolithic cognoscenti. (The travel data needed to be hidden to prevent pan-continental espionage...) The pigments, indeed, were the cause for the monopolistic rise of Atlantis.

This is truly breath-taking, novel material.

Incidentally, on the other side of the (Chinese) Atlantean nexus, the same leyline cuts both Cuzco in Peru and Tianhuanaco [sic] in Bolivia, so giving it a minimum width of 578.2km (361miles). Even in leyline studies, this is stretching it a bit. A similar leyline centred on Stonehenge would, with a width of 361.375miles (Cunningham is numerically very, very precise), encompass most of Europe's capitals, perhaps suggesting a Bronze Age link with Copenhagen's Little Mermaid and Brussels' Manneken Pis.

Taking in Cunningham's 400,000 years of all-encompassing science,

Why should not the mythical Atlantis be joined by a pan-global leyline to Shangri-La?

everything (the cave paintings at Lascaux, Leonardo's Last Supper, the Maya long count, the astronomical markings on the 'Orkney Venus' and some North African geoglyphs only seen on early uncorrected editions of Google's earth map) and everybody (from Alexander the Great's mother to the Native American Hopi Spider Woman) become possible and connected.

Cunningham states often that he is an empirical scientist and reminds us frequently of the onerous tasks and responsibilities that befall such researchers, hence he tests all his conjectures 'thoroughly' (they all pass his exacting testing), but he has failed in perhaps the main task of any researcher: that is, to explain clearly his methods (to allow replication by others) and his

underlying thinking.

So what is the book about? It belongs to the *Heaven's Mirror* clade, and more especially a sub-set of the 'Sailors of Stonehenge' cycle of speculations, but with Cygnus as the main constellation (not Cygnus as we now see it but an imagined starry ante-novæ symmetrical version), a Cygnus that is the stellar image of the Pyramids ("the Swiss army knife of the ancient world"), Mecca and sundry other places of note in the eastern Mediterrean (p79) – oh, and Calanais, Iona, the Ring Of Brodgar and Holy Island in northern Britain (p313) and... there is more.

The Pleiades and Orion (even its shoulders), are downplayed in favour of Hercules (an avatar of Siva, mirroring the location of the Himalayas) and the faint constellation Vulpecula. So in this book the game is the same, the heavenly players have changed, but this time the rules are so arcane (the star charts have to be triple-wrapped around the Mercator projection world map and then possibly rotated by a variety of numbers – 13.660 and 5.10 are favourites) that, despite reading the book twice, summarising the intent and purpose of the book remain a trip too far for me.

The book is certainly novel, whilst all the expected people and special places make appearances there is the addition of many new historical characters, sites and authorities (it is doubtful that all of the last will be pleased to have been cited) to the turmoil.

400,000 Years of Stone Age Science is breathtakingly, bewildering (and bewildered) and baffling, but for breadth and thickness (and not just in leyline terms), it is possibly unsurpassed in recent years, at least since the 19th and 20th century fashion for psychotropic writing declined. (Ah, Xanadu... Now which leyline is that on?)

Rob Ixer





ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTÉAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Occult Paris The Lost Magic of the Belle Époque

Tobias Churton

Inner Traditions 2016

Hb, 493pp, \$29.95, illus, colour plates, notes, bib, ind, ISBN 978162055453



Tobias Churton, a scholar of the Western Occult tradition, paints a vivid and detailed portrait of Paris during the Belle Époque (1871–1914), when it was the fertile medium for many cultural, artistic and esoteric movements, that had considerable influence upon the greater world.

Here is all the background you could wish for about the prime characters – from Blavatsky and Levi, Érik Satie and the Peladians, to Papus and d'Aveydre; priests and painters; musicians and magicians; alchemists and artists; Gnostics, Theosophists and Masons; Surrealists and Decadents – their lives, works, interactions and scandals.

It is dense in detail, but the writing conveys the excitement of an author who savours every aspect of his topic. Reading this almost makes you want to re-read Pauwels and Bergier's *Morning of the Magicians*, this time with greater understanding.

Flesh Falls & Blood Rains

John Hairr

Coachwhip Publications 2016

Pb, 159pp, illus, bib, ind, \$13.95, ISBN 9781616464028



It delights us to see Coachwhip developing an eclectic range of titles, many from writers who have appeared in *FT*.

This nicely made little tome is probably the most strictly fortéan book of recent months, with John Hairr, a Carolina historian, presenting a tightly focused study of falls of flesh-like and blood-like materials. He begins with a couple of general historical essays on

the subject as it is recorded in ancient and more modern documents. The next four cases studied occurred in America, from the most famous of all in Tennessee, 1841, to the celebrated Kentucky 'meat shower' of 1876. From the late 19th century, he accumulates considerable local news reportage and notes that, despite the increasing intrusion of 'scientific explanations' from 'experts' up to the most recent incident chronicled here (in Spain in 2014), the essential mystery remains.

Hairr's level of local and contemporary detail is impressive; the only element missing (as far as we can see) are the theories of Prof Chandra Wickramasinghe on primitive extraterrestrial life. Four appendices, making up a third of the book, present facsimiles (including a historical record from 1679; an attempted chronology from 1577 BC to 1849; another from AD 472 to 1847, and Hairr's own chronological summary of news accounts from 1806 to 2005.

An essential reference for the fortéan meteorologist.

Legend Tripping

The Ultimate Family Experience

Robert C Robinson

Adventures Unlimited Press 2016

Pb, 309pp, illus, \$14.95, ISBN 9781939149640



What Robinson calls 'legend tripping' is a challenge to his readers to get out there and investigate or follow the trails of other investigators. Twenty chapters cover pretty much the whole American gazetteer, from Bigfoot, sites associated with UFOs or hauntings, 'Ghost lights', buried treasure and lake monsters (with Nessie thrown in).

The author is not entirely credulous, providing advice sections on preparing and kit-tling out for such expeditions, and the importance of critical thinking. His enthusiasm, though, might well inspire a

new generation to put down their consoles and set off into the wilderness with their smartphone's GPS (instead of a compass).

Trackbed Tales It's Winter on a Preserved Railway...

NM Scott

Book Guild Publishing 2015

Pb, 64pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781910508862



This slender volume hosts 10 narrated stories of some strange and extraordinary incidents or discoveries made in the supposedly serene world of preserved or restored English railways. Human remains, dangerous creatures, Satanic societies, haunted rolling stock, and the like.

Scott is a published writer of Sherlock Holmes pastiches, so his little stories go at a cracking pace; but don't expect these to be true as no sources are given.

A good one for whiling away time in the lavatory.

Sea Creatures

Ponsonby's Curious Compendium

Dr David Ponsonby & Professor Georges Dussart

Ivy Press 2015

Hb, 286pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781782402459



The (removable) sticker on this book proclaims that the publishers are 'Makers of beautiful books'. This one certainly is, as is the companion volume on insects and spiders. The line engravings, some up to 200 years old, obviously cause some issues, as the authors acknowledge: they have corrected names, where necessary, and explain that the taxonomy might have changed since the illustration was published. They also usefully explain Linnæan classification for those non-biologists among us. The text is edited to the bone to cram in the maximum of information, but the book

does not aim to be a field guide. It is, though, very handsome and (more relevantly for this review) picks up on some decent strange facts about the creatures pictured. Some crabs, for instance, snip poisonous sea anenomes off the rocks and attach them to their shells to repel predators; others clutch them in their claws as a brightly coloured deterrent. The hermaphroditic barnacle fertilises its neighbours "by means of a disproportionately long penis" when not "kicking food into its mouth". Lobsters sometimes shake their claws off on hearing a sudden noise, according to a Victorian naturalist. A wonderful engraving shows a cuttlefish clinging to a Mr Beale ("a sensation of horror pervaded his whole frame") after throwing itself at him. The starfish's powers of regeneration mean that a single arm can regenerate an entire body. And sea cucumbers (a south-east Asian delicacy) entangle predators in a slime; if that doesn't work, they expel their internal organs.

A useful hint: don't swim where you see black lugworm casts, which can often indicate sewage discharge.

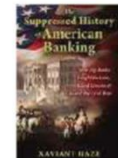
The Suppressed History of American Banking

How Big Banks Fought Jackson, Killed Lincoln, and Caused the Civil War

Xaviant Haze

Bear & Co 2016

Pb, \$16.99, pp.231, illus, notes, bib, index. ISBN 9781591432333



Xaviant Haze investigates the historical origins of the first banks in the newly constituted USA and explains how they "fought Andrew Jackson, killed Abraham Lincoln and caused the Civil War". Jackson was the only president who paid off the national debt. You might assume this was just more wacky conspiracy theory-mongering, but this story is really very interesting; it is also well told and very well researched.



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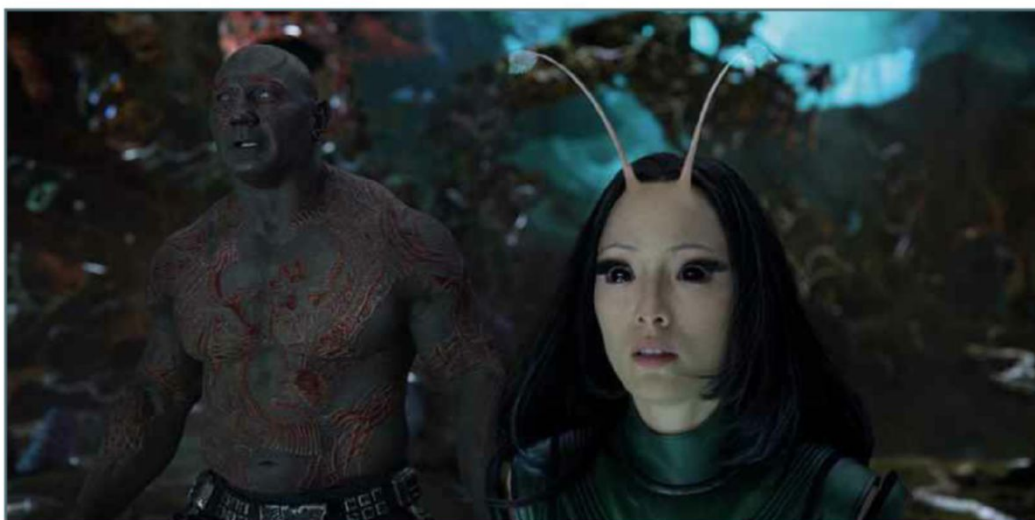
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Orphans of the cosmic storm

They fuck you up, your mum and dad, as Philip Larkin noted, but James Gunn's Marvel sequel holds out the hope that we can get beyond nature and find nurture waiting somewhere in the stars...



Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2

Dir James Gunn, US 2017
On UK release

When James Gunn brought Marvels' ragtag group of rebels – which included a talking racoon and an ambulatory tree – to the big screen back in 2014, no one had ever seen anything quite like them before. Public bafflement and critical bemusement quickly gave way to a surprise summer hit. Capturing lightning in a bottle a second time is a famously difficult trick, of course, but Gunn and his team have come as near as dammit to pulling it off in this wonderfully enjoyable sequel.

The film's astonishing, candy-coloured visuals will probably look familiar this time around, but it's worth reminding yourself just how dull space used to look before *Guardians* came along and spiked the cosmic Kool Aid. If anything, Gunn has upped the dose, and the film's ingenious set pieces, wild palette and fabulous production design – exploring strange new worlds and jumping through bizarre wormholes in space – at times attain a kind of

Each of the film's characters has been the victim of bad parenting

beauty that actually validates the use of CGI.

Beyond the visuals, though, it's the characters that matter, and this time around each of them gets a surprisingly emotional arc in a story that ultimately focuses on issues of family. While the main plot follows Peter Quill's (Chris Pratt) discovery of his biological father Ego (Kurt Russell), the film gradually reveals each of its characters to have been the victim of *extremely* bad parenting – from Nebula (Karen Gillen) being stripped of a limb or organ each time she lost a fight with sister Gamora (Zoe Saldana) to Rocket (Bradley Cooper) and Yondu (Michael Rooker) bonding over the abuse they suffered in their past. Ultimately, and without giving anything away, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.2* becomes

a meditation on nurture over nature, a rejection of genetic destiny and the law of the father in favour of its messed-up orphans, adoptive families and new social structures: a point nicely brought home by the way the Guardians, of whatever species or gender, share 'parenting duties' when it comes to (yes, he's adorable) Baby Groot.

If this all sounds a bit heavy, it isn't (think 1960s *Star Trek*). As well as its Oedipal fixation, the film is full of puerile gags about penises and bodily functions; in fact, laughter is crucial and jokes, butts and all, a form of resistance to deadening solipsism (Id vs Ego?) Oh, and there are perfectly choreographed set pieces, cartoonish violence and a title sequence that's almost worth the price of admission in its own right. The film suffers from a bit of sag in the final showdown, but then makes up for it with a touching final reel. All in all, this Easter egg and cameo-crammed sequel is a feast for the senses and a wild ride.

David Sutton



Alien: Covenant

Dir Ridley Scott, US 2017
On UK release

Anyone who has been a fan of the *Alien* franchise long enough to remember the unadulterated thrill it was once synonymous with, can attest to the fact that no matter which faction of fandom you belong to, you are no stranger to disappointment. Thus, no one was particularly surprised when *Prometheus* got a lukewarm reception upon its release in 2012, as it wasn't the first time that a lacklustre instalment had been presented to the waiting hordes.

While *Prometheus* has since gained a significant following, which enjoys analysing the film's themes and ambiguous storytelling, many have been waiting with bated breath for the return of everyone's favourite nightmare creature, namely the iconic xenomorph. The reappearance of the hellish creature has been no secret, as the marketing for *Alien: Covenant* has been very upfront about its return in Ridley Scott's latest effort, promising that it will bring some much needed horror back to the franchise.

From the beginning of the film, it is clear that *Alien: Covenant* is quite different from its predecessor in terms of tone. This will please old school fans, as it seemingly brings the new film closer to its roots. However, the themes of *Prometheus* are not neglected; indeed, they are explored in more detail, thus building on the thematic additions introduced in the previous instalment. This will likely intrigue supporters of *Prometheus*, while lovers of *Alien* and *Aliens* may become restless as they wait for the film to pick up pace. Once the film kicks into gear, we are presented

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

Phenomena

Dir Dario Argento, Italy 1985

Arrow Video, £24.99 (Blu-ray + CD limited edition)

The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave

Dir Emilio Miraglia, Italy 1971

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

The Red Queen Kills Seven Times

Dir Emilio Miraglia, Italy 1972

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

Crimson

Dir Juan Fortuny, Spain 1976

Black House Films, £9.99 (DVD)

When it comes to the Brexit negotiations, there's one demand that I insist on: we must retain the free movement of European horror movies. True, their presence on our shores may sometimes take the shelf space of homegrown titles, but if we let these films into our country, they can both enrich and enhance our culture with their bloody spurts, funky soundtracks and leather-gloved killers.

Take, for example, Dario Argento's *Phenomena* from 1985, in which Jennifer Connelly plays a teenage insect lover who strokes bees and summons telepathic flies while trying to escape a homicidal chimp with a razor. Also known as *Creepers*, the film's a decapitation riot, with Donald Pleasence doing an amusing Scottish accent as a paraplegic entomologist. Plus, there's one of the most bizarrely placed music cues you'll ever see in a movie. An important character sadly dies and is taken off in an ambulance: Argento scores this touching scene by loudly playing 'Locomotive' by Motorhead. At first you're like... huh? And then you're



"Donald Pleasence does an amusing Scottish accent as a paraplegic entomologist"

like... wow! Arrow's new release of the film is packed with extras and alternative versions, as well as a CD copy of the score.

Next up: two 1970s *giallos* from Emilio Miraglia. In *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave*, a kinky aristocrat loses his wife so tries to move on by luring women to his castle. He marries again, but then people start dying horribly. Has Evelyn returned for vengeance? It's a nice little horror movie, but I actually preferred *The*

Red Queen Kills Seven Times. The film opens like an Italian horror version of Disney's *Frozen*. Two little sisters struggle to play normally because one of them can't control her anger. In the first reel she grabs her sister's doll and stabs it in the face, right in front of grandpa. So there's not much 'conceal, don't feel' here. But could the sister's inner instinct for violence be part of an age-old family curse? Years later it seems it might, when workers at a mid-range fashion house start getting stabbed. Admittedly, Alan Turing might have struggled to follow the plot at times, but it's an elaborate and absorbing whodunit, with gothic chills and a killer score.

Finally, we have *Crimson*, a horror thriller, peppered with random scenes of soft porn. It stars Euro horror fave Paul Naschy as a crime boss who gets shot in the head. Naturally, the only solution is a brain transplant: so they get a brain from Naschy's arch enemy, another crime boss called 'The Sadist'. When the henchmen try to decapitate him, though, they realise they've lost their knife. So they go for the next logical option, and use a train. It's bizarre elements like that which make some Euro-horror a complete turn off for some audiences. But if you want your entertainment culture rich, fun and spicy then I implore you: keep the horror borders open!



with a handful of monstrously gory sequences placed at carefully selected intervals where they intertwine with the themes of *Prometheus*. Here, the character of David and his motivations are explored in more detail, with Michael Fassbender upping the ante in his portrayal of the villainous David, while also portraying the new android character of Walter as a distinctly different individual. Katherine Waterston is enjoyable as Daniels, and Danny McBride's Tennessee is very likable, a welcome reminder of the kind of characters that were an integral part of the enjoyment associated with the early films.

However, with *Alien: Covenant* being hell-bent on creating an amalgamation of two such vastly different strands of the same franchise, it doesn't quite manage to pay sufficient attention to either, which results in the film becoming an inexcusably bland imitation of its predecessors. Not only does the revelation as to what David has been up to since the events of *Prometheus* seem clumsily executed in terms of the literary works it seeks to paraphrase, but the film is also weighed down by an endless stream of callbacks to the first two movies, which prevents this one from ever really creating its own identity. This is further evident in the portrayal of the crew, which aside from the aforementioned characters are so utterly disposable and one-dimensional that the audience's inability to invest in them severely detracts from the impact of the horror elements.

Some people will enjoy the first half of the film but dislike the second half, and vice versa; which is understandable, as Scott has essentially managed to cram what should have been at least two separate movies into a single two-hour feature. As a result, the film feels rushed, its frustratingly rapid pace flying in the face of what once made the franchise great – namely relatable, fleshed-out characters and a sense of pacing that managed to be tight and tense while still taking its time to create a suspenseful atmosphere.

In the end, *Alien: Covenant* is a stunning looking but disappointing addition to an



otherwise wonderfully terrifying movie universe, and while it may impress newcomers to the franchise, long-suffering fans will likely feel that it's game over, man.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Raw

Dir Julia Ducournau, France/Belgium 2016

On UK release

The timid Justine (Garance Marillier) is about to begin studying at the same veterinary school that the rest of her family attended. As well as their choice of profession, another thing that runs in the family is vegetarianism. Justine finds this lifestyle choice challenged when, in one of the relentless hazing rituals she is forced to participate in at the school, she has to eat a raw rabbit kidney. When her sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf), a school senior, scolds Justine for refusing to follow tradition, Justine reluctantly lets Alexia stuff the kidney into her mouth. Afterwards, she seemingly has an allergic reaction, but as she continues to adjust to life at the school during a first week of pranks and rituals, she begins to feel a craving she has never felt before – a craving for raw flesh.

When a film about cannibalism gets hyped because of audience members supposedly falling ill due to the gruesome visuals, one suspects a marketing campaign aimed at parting those in search of controversy from their money. Even if the feature in question does contain genuinely shocking imagery, gore for gore's sake not only has a tendency to get terribly tedious terribly quickly, it can also be an indication of a poor script, which has been covered in blood only to hide its shortcomings. While the yelps and gasps at my screening were indeed plentiful during the body horror scenes, there is thankfully a lot more to Julia Ducournau's feature debut than mere blood-spattered hype.

Although *Raw* is definitely not for the squeamish, it avoids falling victim to the tropes so often associated with cannibalism-themed horror by having a story with very relatable human themes at its core. As much as the film is about the main

character's self-discovery in terms of her cannibalistic desires, this awakening is deeply intertwined with her self-discovery in terms of her sexuality and independence. The defiance and conflict that come with Justine being a young woman on the cusp of adulthood make this a highly fleshed out character portrayal with a meaty character arc, in which the intense environment she finds herself in serves as the catalyst for her development. This is not only in terms of the very literal catalyst of the hazing ritual, but also because of how the college environment removes her from her comfort zone, forcing her to interact with strangers and adapt to her new surroundings. Ducournau brilliantly conveys the intensity of the school environment through stunning cinematography and a pounding sound design that forcibly pulls the viewer into the oppressive and aggressive atmosphere, creating a vivid and visceral cinematic experience.

The acting further enhances the intense atmosphere, as well as the story's human aspect: Marillier and Rumpf work exceptionally well together, making their connection as sisters perfectly believable. It adds a grounded nature to the horrific proceedings, as sibling rivalry gets taken to a new level and their relationship becomes increasingly animalistic. Their sparring is also dryly humorous at times, which gives the film a nicely balanced tone and prevents it becoming too self-serious.

It's rare for a film about a taboo such as cannibalism to be genuinely compelling, simply because the subject is so abstract, and potentially absurd, that the viewer is not fully immersed in the story, especially when this involves emotionally investing in the cannibal rather than the victim. Ducournau's rich stew of disturbing body horror and human self-discovery is therefore a remarkable achievement, not only in terms of representations of cannibalism, but also from a purely cinematic standpoint: while it won't be to everyone's liking, this is definitely one of the tastier items on this year's cinematic menu thus far.

Leyla Mikkelsen



SHORTS

SHUT IN

Arrow Films, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

Naomi Watts and her paralysed stepson are trapped in their isolated home during a snowstorm. But who is the little kid who keeps turning up at her bedroom door, and might the house be haunted? This psychological thriller tries hard to be intense, but there's a whole series of those moments where you slap your head at the main character's actions. Plus you've seen these sorts of jump scares and melodramatic plot reveals a hundred times before. The film looks impressive and there's the seed of a good idea here, but the execution is surprisingly weak. **PL** ★ ★

REALM OF THE DAMNED

3 Wolves, £19.99 (Blu-ray), £14.99 (DVD)

Drug addict Alberic Van Helsing is forced to fight the undead in this 'animated motion comic'. The graphic novel has plenty of admirers, and they may well get a kick out of the film version, but bear in mind that this is just static pictures with occasional moving arms or splats of blood. As a result, I quickly lost interest. The other problem was that I couldn't tell if the film was trying to take itself seriously or if it was being deliberately tongue-in-cheek. I hope it's the latter, because its attempts to offend – a bit like a teenager saying the filthiest thing he can think of – simply made me laugh. Comes with art cards and stuff too, if you're into that. **PL** ★ ★

SWISS ARMY MAN

Lions Gate Home Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

Beginning with Hank (Paul Dano) using the flatulence of the seemingly dead Manny (Daniel Radcliffe) to propel himself back to the mainland from the island he was marooned on, *Swiss Army Man* only continues to increase in weirdness. As the journey back to civilisation continues, Manny seemingly becomes more and more alive as Hank teaches him about life, just as Hank finds increasingly fantastic uses for Manny's body, solving a multitude of issues with this human multi-tool. As absurd as the film is and as much as some audiences will be put off by the use of flatulence, it is far from a cacophony of fart jokes simply for the sake of cheap laughs. Instead, the film is rather about our tendency to bottle things up and how much of a hindrance we are to our own happiness. The solid performance from Dano and the genuinely impressive one from Radcliffe help sell the surreal premise, ensuring the film becomes less an outrageous fantasy flick and rather a well-executed and original piece of cinema that gets its points across with equally humorous and heartfelt metaphors, easily outweighing any crudity. **LM** ★ ★ ★ ★

CITY OF THE DEAD

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual Format)

This cult film from 1960 is now available on Blu-ray in gorgeous high definition, a 4K restoration from the original negative. It's an atmospheric effort that makes the most of its smoky Shepperton soundstage sets. After a nicely barking opening which sees 17th century witch Elizabeth Selwyn (Patricia Jessel) burned at the stake, we cut to the present day where way-too-passionate lecturer Alan Driscoll (Christopher Lee) is giving a seminar about her. Student Nan Barlow (Venetia Stevenson) is looking to do some primary research and Driscoll suggests Whitewood, the town where we saw Selwyn getting roasted. The film manages a pretty unexpected rug tug, going for a bit of a *Psycho* vibe in changing lead characters. It all ends in a fiery mess, the classic 'evil is beaten by the power of Christ' schtick, but there are a couple of really decent moments of horror: the perfect Sunday afternoon shocker. **Martin Parsons** ★ ★ ★ ★



SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTLEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the off shore 'pirate' pop station of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortune topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR will be your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortune topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: Scamapalooza
(www.conman.com.au/tag/podcast)

Host: Nicholas J Johnson

Episode count: 40

Format: Interview-based discussion-show

Established: July 2015

Frequency: Weekly

Topics: Cons & conmen, fake science, magic, crime

Nicholas J Johnson is a practising magician, comedian and writer from Australia. He has done a series of live shows in Melbourne, Edinburgh and elsewhere, part of which involves exposing scam artists and the techniques they use to con the gullible, and has appeared on current affairs and news programmes as an expert on fraud and deception, revealing the tricks of the con artist's trade. He runs the online Scamopedia, a repository of the greatest cons, swindles and deceptions from history and the headlines. His podcast, Scamapalooza, is an offshoot of

the website.

The podcast is wide-ranging in subject matter, but at the heart of most episodes is human gullibility. Some recent fortune subjects covered include an in-depth, two-part interview with Spyros Melaris, who claims to have been behind the infamous Ray Santilli 'alien autopsy' hoax; online romance scams; the perils of identity theft; and the offering of cash prizes to prove psychic powers.

A lot of the focus is on human nature and our propensity for being fooled; that's how magic tricks work, but the same techniques are used by scam artists and conmen, whether they are out for money, attempting to fake the presence of aliens or convince us of the reality of psychic powers. Perception and illusion are at the heart of these subjects – and they are at the heart of Scamapalooza.

A number of episodes have tackled movies about deception, including Orson Welles's *F For Fake*, Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon*, film noir classic *Nightmare Alley* and, of course, *The Sting*, with Paul Newman and Robert Redford. The two *Now You See Me* magic heist movies are also examined, and get a mixed reaction.

Of particular interest to FT readers is Episode #17 on the

He exposes scam artists and the techniques they use to con the gullible

Cottingley Fairy photographs created by two Victorian girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffith, who fooled Sir Arthur Conan Doyle into believing in them. Melbourne-based pop culture broadcaster Sarah Baggs joins Johnson to explore the case in some depth over 40 minutes, taking in photographic experts who were convinced of the images' genuineness, Spiritualists and theosophists who all promoted the pictures as proof of the existence of the supernatural. The discussion explores how the photos came to be created, the background of the two girls behind the deception, why the public of the early-20th century were so desperate to believe in the existence of fairies and why certain forces conspired to maintain the deception. It also takes in how the story lasted so long and the efforts undertaken to prove the photos were fake – which took a ridiculously long time.

"What surprised me most about Sarah Baggs's visit was not that people believed the

hoax but the reasons why," said Johnson. "From Conan Doyle's desire to prove that his fairy-seeing father wasn't insane to Edward Gardner, the leader of the Theosophical movement, who refused to believe mere girls could be so devious."

A later episode (#24) tackles Conan Doyle's 'frenemy', escape artist and magician Harry Houdini, who spent a lot of time debunking fraudulent psychics and spirit mediums. With John Cox, creator of the Wild About Houdini website, Johnson discusses the 1924 case in which Houdini went head-to-head with Mina Crandon, a Boston medium infamous for her highly sexual séances. In 1924 *Scientific American* magazine offered a cash prize for proof of paranormal activity, which drew Houdini into a mission to test Crandon's claimed abilities. The public willingness to believe in Crandon was so strong that many saw Houdini's proof that she was faking the events during her séances as evidence not of deception but of Houdini's own attempt to sabotage the test itself.

The subject matter of Scamapalooza roams far and wide, but it is consistently concerned with the central fortune question of how people perceive the world, and how they can be fooled into willingly believing in the impossible.

Strengths: Loose, conversational style draws the listener in; Johnson clearly knows his stuff.

Weaknesses: Sometimes goes down a tangent, drifting from the main subject.

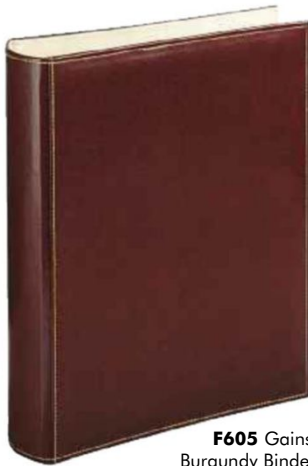
Recommended Episodes: #11 *Just a Little Prick (Autism vaccine controversy)*; #17 *The Cottingley Fairies*; #23 *The Sun and the Moon (Newspaper hoaxes)*; #24 *Houdini and the Medium*.

Verdict: An addictive and engaging series of discussions of fortune interest.

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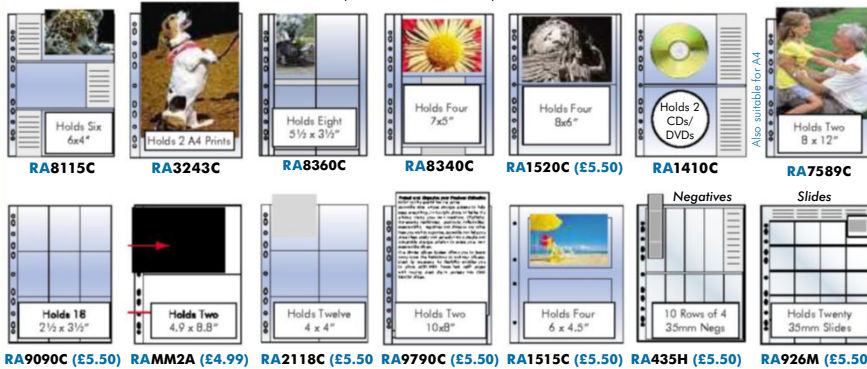
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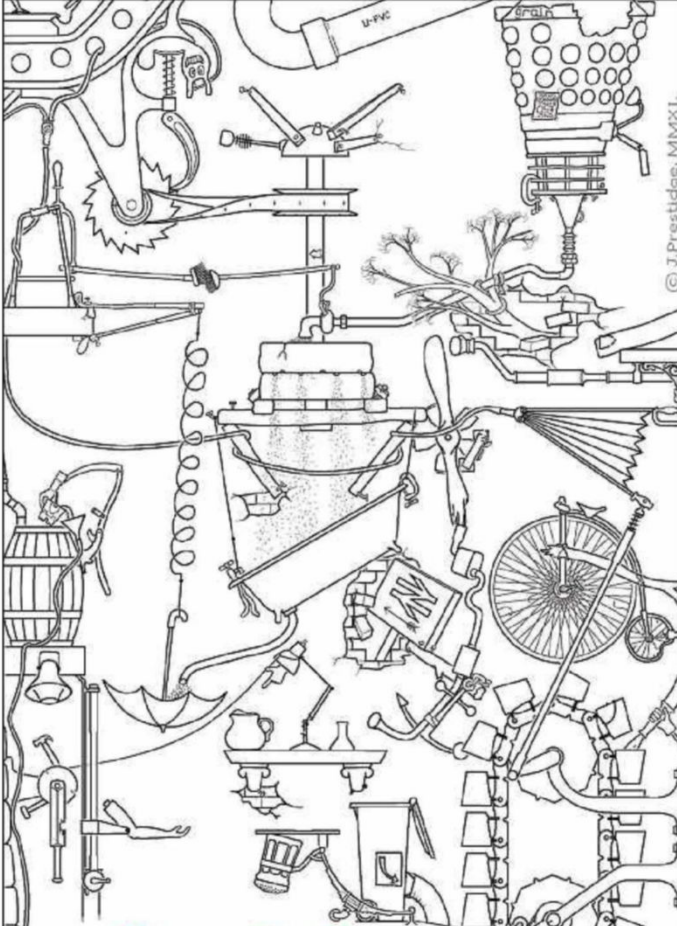
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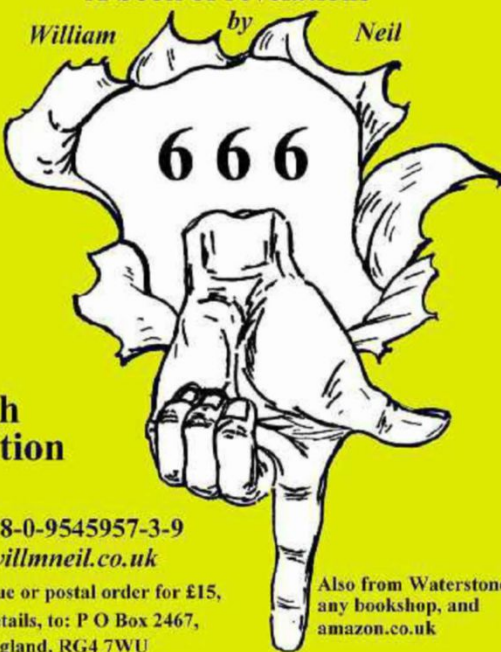
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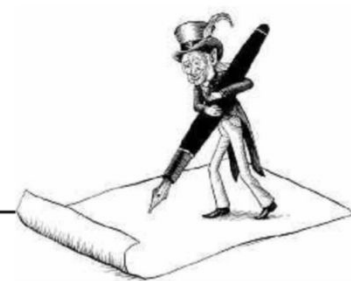
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Early saucers

Simon von Someren, noting that the description of UFOs as 'saucer-shaped' dates from 1947, argues that this may not merely arise from a mistake, but that UFOs may really be saucer-shaped [FT351:71]. In fact, there were a number of round flying objects reported before 1947. On 11 April 1651, for example, a Mrs Holt in Cheshire saw a number of "small Pewter dishes" in the sky, according to a contemporary pamphlet. In the *Jataka*, a collection of lives of pre-incarnations of the Buddha, compiled about 2,000 years ago but based on older folkloric material, the god Indra decided to reward a virtuous king by giving him a guided tour of heaven, so he sent his charioteer to collect him. It so happened that that evening the people of the city were celebrating a Full Moon festival. They said to each other: "There are two moons in the sky tonight". Then they saw that one of them was actually the chariot of Indra. This evidently reflects a long-standing belief that chariots of the gods were round and shiny. Fort noted some such stories in chapter 21 of *The Book of the Damned*, suggesting that "vast wheel-like constructions" were "adapted to roll through a gelatinous medium from planet to planet." The idea that flying discs from outer space were invented in 1947 ignores the earlier evidence.

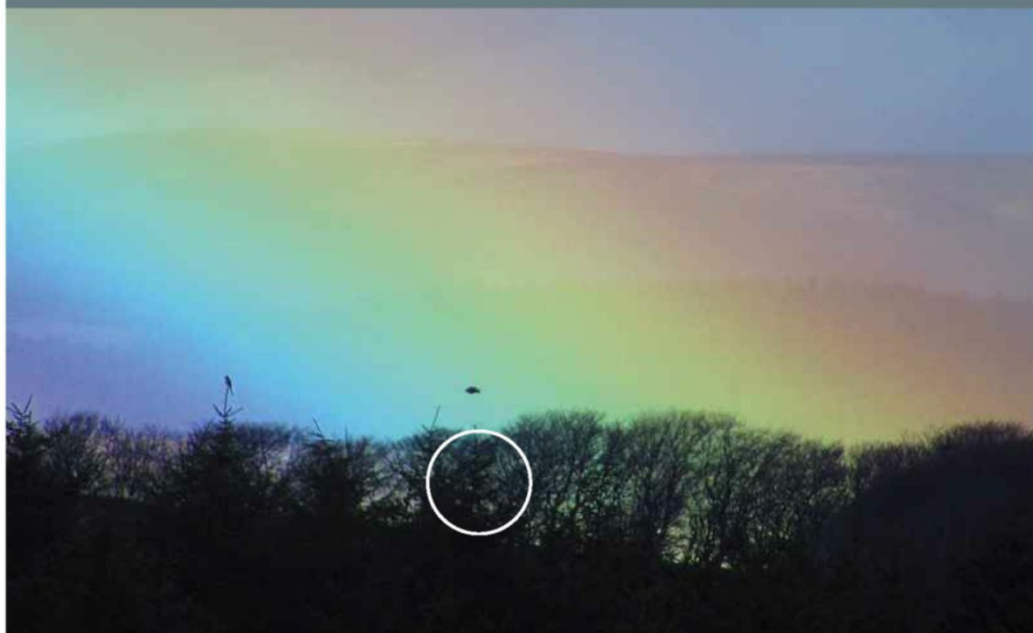
Gareth J Medway
London

Unicorn recipes

Regarding your Fortfoolery article on April Fool hoaxes [FT352:28-33]: the 2012 British Library 'discovery' of a lost mediæval recipe for cooking unicorns may have been a hoax, but it was not quite as far-fetched as it might seem. In the 12th century, Hildegard of Bingen suggested something very similar.

St Hildegard (1098-1179), sometimes called the Sybil of the Rhine for her visions, was also a composer, mystic and general polymath. She is widely considered the founder of scientific natural history in Germany for her two books on medicine: *Physica* and *Causæ et Curæ*.

SIMULACRA CORNER



Lorna Stroup Nilsson was taking photos of a rainbow on Dartmoor, Devon, when she caught a magpie perched on the topmost twig of a tree... and what appears to be a fish flying past. It was actually a jackdaw, but it does show how easy it is for interesting mistakes to be made.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.



In the *Physica* she lists the medicinal properties of various animal parts including, as it happens, those of the unicorn: "Take some Unicorn liver, grind it up and mash with egg yolk to make an ointment. Every type of leprosy is healed if treated frequently with this ointment. Make also some shoes from Unicorn leather and wear them, thus assuring ever-healthy feet, thighs and joints; nor will the plague ever attack those limbs. Anyone who fears being poisoned should place a Unicorn hoof beneath the plate containing his food, or the mug holding his liquor. If warm food and drink are poisoned, the hoof will make them effervesce; if they are cold it will make them steam. Thus one can detect whether they are poisoned or not."

Nigel Suckling
author of *The Book of the Unicorn* (Paper Tiger, 1996)
Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Antiworlds and EVP

I was interested to read about an inverse mirror universe and "Janus-time" [FT351:22], as Konstantin Raudive refers to something similar in his 1971 opus *Breakthrough* (p.140f., 390f.) In the 1960s, Dr Leon Ledermann of Columbia University postulated an "anti-world", where time would run backwards. Intriguingly, one of Raudive's voices says "Antiwelten sind", "Anti-worlds exist" (note the plural).

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Born Again

Good news has come since I wrote my piece on the Paris bookshop *Un Regard Moderne* and the death of its owner [FT351:55]. The shop has since re-opened, or at least a shop with the same name has re-opened in the same place. It

can never be quite the same shop without Monsieur Noel, but it is certainly better than nothing.

Phil Baker
London

Thanks For Nothing

I feel considerable bitterness after reading your article concerning the presidential candidacy of Andrew Basiago [FT351:48-51], published well after the elections were held in the US. Had Mr Basiago received the attention he deserved during the campaign, our world would be very different. Americans were stuck with the concept that there were only two viable presidential candidates (almost all Americans voted for Clinton or Trump.) Well, wait for 2020, when earthlings live on eggs on Mars and we bounce through time like rubber balls!

Bryan White
Duncanville, Texas



Ice circle

Here is a photograph of a perfectly circular ice disc that appeared in the Pine River in Vestaburg, Michigan, around 6 January this year. It was reported in the *Morning Sun* newspaper in Vestaburg on 11 January. (Editor's note: for more on ice discs, see **FT74:23-27, 248:22-23, 254:8, 280:7.**)

William Kingsley Member of INFO and SITU. Michigan

Mystical numerology

Regarding your report about Flight 666 to HEL on Friday 13 January 2017 [**FT351:7**]: not all biblical scholars agree that 666 is the "number of the Beast". Some favour 616 [**FT201:17**]. Also, it is pure myth that UK registration number plates cannot contain the sequence 666. I have seen many examples over the years.

Nick Warren
Pinner, Middlesex

Liminal exploration

I am writing to commend Jenny Randles's column on timelessness [**FT350:26-27**]. I am convinced that there is a great truth to our existence that cannot be seen by staring straight at it, but which can be glimpsed, as it were, out of the corner of our eye, from what happens at the edge of our human experience. It is a belief that has driven and shaped my interest in forteana,

and though that great truth remains elusive, it continues to beckon us all on.

Bert Gray-Malkin
Bristol

Olfactory wonders

After reading the interesting article "Nosewitness: the smell of high strangeness" [**FT350:30-37**], I felt an opportunity was missed by not referencing the excellent *Jacobson's Organ* (1999) by Lyall Watson [reviewed **FT134:55**]. He states that smell is the forgotten sense and then takes us on an amazing journey through the olfactory wonders. Watson was a South African botanist, biologist, zoologist, anthropologist and ethologist [see obituary, **FT241:24**].

Philip Hemmisse
By email

Vaults and cars

Could "the curious vaults at Staunton, Suffolk" with their

moving coffins [**FT349:70-71**] have been not at Stanton, Suffolk, as often suggested, but at Santon Downham, Suffolk, in what's now Thetford Forest up against the border with Norfolk? Santon Downham has a church, St Mary's, parts of which are Norman. While I'm not aware of this church having vaults or a crypt, it has many features showing signs of having being "filled in" during Victorian restoration. The Norfolk border would have been a lot further away in 1815 – in those days, all the land as far north as Thetford (now in Norfolk) was part of Suffolk. Santon Downham is now the headquarters of the Forestry Commission for the East of England, although today's extensive Thetford Forest – England's biggest lowland forest – hadn't been planted back in 1815, at the time of the earliest known report of the moving coffins of "Staunton, Suffolk".

There is also the Suffolk village of Sproughton (pronounced *spror-ton*), which could have been

garbled to "Staunton." It lies on the western extremity of Ipswich and has a 14th century church whose eastern end is entirely a Victorian restoration job. The village is on the River Gipping and still has an old watermill. It's best known for the Wild Man pub, named after a wildman who appeared in a nearby wasteland and terrorised the 15th century builders of the inn.

I've found several examples of forteen events recorded as happening at mystery Suffolk place names that can no longer be traced. One of the witchcraft suspects convicted of "using imps" during the Witchfinder General's East of England reign of terror in 1649 was a man from "Steak, Suffolk", although we're none to wiser as to where "Steak" is. Present-day Stoke by Clare? Stoke by Nayland? Or Stoke St Mary, now the Stoke Park neighbourhood of Ipswich, where Ipswich railway station stands?

The Proceedings of the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club for 1824 (p287) describes the discovery of live, entombed lizards dug out of a chalk pit in "Eden, Suffolk," although no such place is known today. It could be a very garbled reference to Elveden in the west of the country, best known for England's tallest war memorial, with the right geology for chalk pits. But there's also an Eden Park in Suffolk County, Virginia, in the US, which could somehow have got transposed to Suffolk in the East of England in this case.

And Fiery Mount, the house in the parish of Ufford, Suffolk, where Miss Walpole's sister reported to the Fairy Census hearing fairy harps in the 1930s [**FT321:46-49**], seems itself to have done a fairy vanishing act. Ufford's Parish Clerk told me they could find no record of there ever having been a Fairy Mount in their parish.

● Re the Hoodoo Car legend attached to the car in which Franz Ferdinand was a passenger that fateful June 1914 day in Sarajevo [**FT352:43-44**]: I recall reading yet another version of the story in about 1976 when I was nine or 10. It was in a thin Pan paperback



with the word “Strange” in the title, containing many stories it claimed were true. There was a section on cursed items, pieces of jewellery that brought misfortune on their aristocratic owners and so on.

One “curse” was that of Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s ‘unlucky’ car. In this version, the bomb hurled at the motorcade by Young Bosnian assassin Nedjelko Čabrinović, bouncing off the bonnet of Franz Ferdinand’s car, exploding under the car behind and wounding 16 people, (an incident which actually happened) was as a result of the ‘curse’ of the car. This somehow acted with an evil intelligence to deflect the bomb off its bonnet and injure lots of people elsewhere. The car’s driver taking a wrong turn down a Sarajevo street and bringing it within a metre or two of bumbling assassin Gavrilo Princip was, naturally, attributed to the curse as well, rather than the confusion that followed the first assassination attempt.

There followed the usual string of accidents to people who drove the car (I vaguely remember that in one of these, something catastrophic happened around it when it was requisitioned to the front in World War I.) What I remember most vividly from the story was that it ended with the car, in its museum in Vienna, taking a direct hit from Allied aerial bombardment in the final months of World War II, which naturally completely destroyed the museum and the car with it. This, of course, was part of the curse, which only ended with the complete destruction of the cursed car itself.

Except that it was untrue. While Vienna’s Heeresgeschichtliches Museum was almost completely destroyed by bombing in 1943, then its ruins fought over by the advancing Red Army, Franz Ferdinand’s car and most of the then extant collection had already been evacuated in 1938 and restored to a rebuilt museum by 1955.

Matt Salusbury
Dunwich, Suffolk

It might interest readers to note that the registration number of

the Graf & Stift open-top touring car in which Franz Ferdinand was shot was A 111 118. Some choose to see this as a nod to the date of the Armistice that ended the conflict: 11/11/18.

Graeme Donald
Cheshire

Cold-blooded

I must disagree with Nils Grande, who implies that thermal imaging cameras cannot image reptiles because they are cold-blooded [FT251:71]. Cold-blooded simply means they do not maintain a constant body temperature. Reptiles do indeed have an internal elevated temperature, just not a constant temperature as mammals do.

Mark Dormann
Palm Coast, Florida

Editor’s note: In his unabridged email, Mr Grande merely wondered whether reptiles, being cold-blooded, would show up on thermal-imaging cameras, but sub-editing made it appear that he was asserting that they would not. Our apologies.

Traditional cruelty

In the 1870s my grandfather used to take part in “Cutty Wren” begging in Little Haven, Pembrokeshire. The wren was carried in a willow-cage and at the end of the day (26 December) was burnt alive on a bonfire. The song sung was much the same as the Irish one given by Paul Whyte [FT352:72], but I do not believe they dressed up. Even then, the practice was beginning to fade, but it raised strong emotions locally.

Patrick F James
Swallowcliffe, Wiltshire

No sense in trying?

After reading Peter Brookesmith’s latest piece “There is no sense in trying” [FT352:26], I have finally decided to ask the question that has long puzzled me: Why do people who believe so wholeheartedly that there is nothing to UFO phenomena care so much about it? I’m no fan of the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis myself, and have long since given up taking

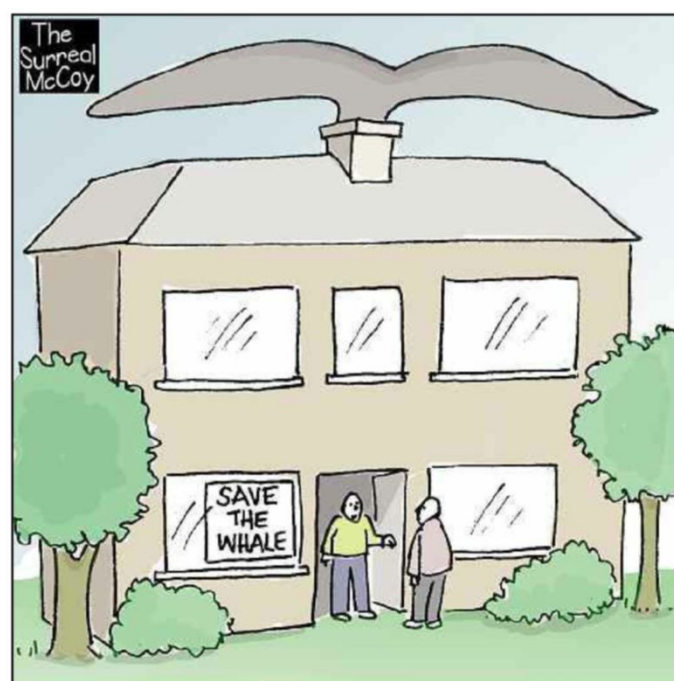
much interest in the subject: it just seems all too much like a sort of New Age religion rather than a genuine field of study *per se*. As a result, I don’t give it much (if any) of my time. Sometimes people see puzzling things in the sky, and some people like to regard them as evidence that we are being visited by creatures from outer space. I think I understand why people continue to believe in visits by ET, in the absence of any really good evidence, but I fail to understand why, for example, Robert Sheaffer goes to UFO conferences. As the title of the article suggests, there really is no point trying to dissuade people of a belief that provides them with some kind of psychological comfort, so why bother at all? Is it just because it can be fun, if a little cruel, to sneer at people who hold eccentric beliefs, or is it the sceptical equivalent of evangelical Christians who turn up to heavy metal concerts and gay pride marches, trying to “save” the participants from their “sinful” ways? If Peter or another ufological sceptic could give me an answer, I would be extremely grateful!

Nicholas Southwell
Penzance, Cornwall

Hyde’s phantom lorry

A little further information on the Phantom Lorry of Hyde mentioned in “Weirdness on Wheels” [FT350:29]. I have lived most of my life in Hyde [now part of Greater Manchester] and can confirm that the legend of this ghostly apparition was still being told when I was a child in the late 1960s-70s. I have traversed this section of Mottram Road around the New Inn, which used to be the main Manchester-to-Sheffield route, almost every day, but I’ve never seen anything untoward.

Between 1927 and 1930, this section of road accounted for 16 accidents involving vehicles, motorcycles and pedestrians. Considering the amount of traffic in the early Thirties and on a fairly straight section of road, this does seem a large number. The New Inn landlord reported unusual activity outside the premises, including vehicles moving on their own – although one incident does sound as if a handbrake had not been applied correctly. A neighbour left her nearby bungalow because “strange noises and ghostly occurrences had got on her nerves”. (See ‘Our Town, The Phantom Lorry, Remembering Hyde’ by Jeffery Stafford



“It’s all very well but quite frankly we’re running out of space”

CAROL ISAACS

LETTERS

<<http://hydonian.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/phantom-lorry-of-hyde.html>>).

The events generated a number of spurious articles around the world. A French newspaper ran a story of a woodland murder that the accused tried to blame on the Phantom Lorry, and an American newspaper's sensational account placed Hyde among a witchcraft-ridden mountain range known as the High Peaks, and in a near-inaccessible forest called the Peak Forest. It was inhabited by a backward tribe of half-savage natives whose weird rituals included sacrificing victims to the god of the speeding chariot every month.

On Christmas Eve 1944, Westwood Farmhouse, opposite the New Inn, standing alone in miles of open farmland, sustained a direct hit from a doodlebug (carried piggy-back style by a bomber, then released), killing two people. In the 1960s Manchester Council purchased the land to the rear of the New Inn to build the vast Hattersley estate to accommodate the overspill from the slum clearance around the city. Almost directly behind the New Inn was 16 Wardle Brook Avenue, home of the Moors Murderers Myra Hindley and Ian Brady.

Ant Marriott

Hyde, Greater Manchester

Japanese origins

The discovery of Roman coins in Okinawa [FT350:13] reminds me of stories I've heard here in Japan about other earlier than historically recognised contact with the West. There is a suggestion that one of the Lost Tribes of Israel came to Japan, for example. Proponents of the idea, known as the Japanese-Jewish common ancestry theory, go as far as to say that Japanese people are descended from the tribe (or at least a portion of the population). They point to some apparent similarities between Judaism and Shinto, Japan's local religion of ancient folklore and customs. For



Fortean birthday surprise!

This is a photograph of my husband, Neil, with his birthday gift from me.

Neil has been published in the letters pages of *FT* on two occasions: the first was in 2008, when he wrote about my encounter with a giant caterpillar, and the second was when he recently sent in letters that his pupils had written about their strange experiences (he is an English teacher). Unfortunately, the magazine in which the first letter was published was accidentally recycled, so I contacted the team at *FT* to see if they could help. After explaining my problem (I didn't even know which issue it had been published in), not only did they manage to track down the story but they sent me a copy of the issue in which it was published. As you can see, I was able to put this issue and the one that hadn't been lost in frames for Neil to keep.

Many, many thanks to the team at *Fortean Times* for helping me to make this happen!

Lyn Powney, Basildon, Essex

instance, I've had it explained to me that the Tengu, a magical creature of Japanese folklore (collectively known as yokai in Japanese), is possible evidence, with its big nose and traditional little hat resembling the Jewish hat or cap.

Another theory is that Jesus himself visited Japan, and even died and is buried in a small town in Aomori prefecture, northern Japan. His resting place is supposedly a small tomb in Shingo, Aomori. The story goes that Jesus had a brother, who took his place on the cross and allowed Jesus to flee to Japan, where he lived a quiet life as a farmer and was buried in the town [See 'Land of the Rising Son' by Edward Mazza and Glenn Kardy,

FT110:24-26, May 1998].

My personal theory is that the story was created by Japanese Christians, often known as Kakure Christians (hiding Christians) due to the persecution they suffered during the Edo period that forced them into hiding their faith and worshipping in secret. I have visited caves in the region of northern Japan, where Kakure Christians used to hide and worship in relative safety. Believing in a closer connection between Japan and Jesus would have helped them get through the difficult years of persecution. (I have heard that the new film *Silence* covers the rough time early Christians had in Japan.)

Other proposed early visits

by foreigners include shipwrecked Russian sailors on the coast of Akita, also in the north, whose appearance, hitherto unseen by local Japanese fishermen, may have started tales of ferocious demons coming from across the sea – and spawned the Namahage, traditional local demons who terrorise naughty children, like Japanese bogeymen. (I'm reminded of the tale of a monkey in Hartlepool being mistaken for a French spy and hanged.)

While these theories likely have little basis in reality, it is interesting when new archaeological discoveries challenge our view of the extent of globalisation in the ancient world.

Richard Eccleston

By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Fairy Music

I was interested to read the Music at Night article on fairy music [FT350:25]. It reminded me of something that happened to me many (very many) years ago. I was coming home from seeing something on London's South Bank – I cannot remember what, but it was in the days before the South Bank had exploded into shops and cafés; instead it was a place of lonely walks and dark flights of stairs. As I passed one of these I heard someone playing a pipe or a recorder. The tune was the Faery Chorus from 'The Immortal Hour' – the one that starts 'How beautiful they are, the Lordly Ones...' the sound, coming out of the blackness was indescribably eerie. I stood, for a moment, wondering why a busker would be playing on that stairway, with no likelihood of passers-by, or the chance of any change being thrown his or her way. I peered up the stairs but I could see nothing. I had not the slightest inclination to investigate (if it was a fairy call, then I was evidently not on the list of people they wanted) and I walked on.

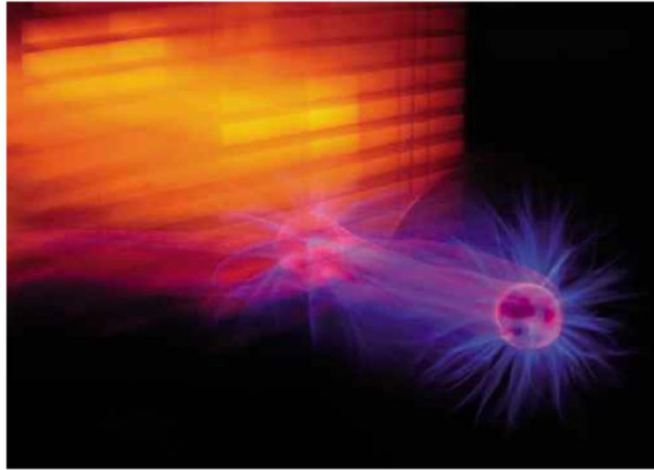
But if I had been drawn to climb those stairs... if I had...

Tina Rath
London

Editor's note: The Immortal Hour is a 'faery opera' by the socialist composer Rutland Boughton, first performed in Glastonbury in 1914, at the inaugural Glastonbury Festival that Boughton co-founded. He adapted his own libretto from the works of Fiona MacLeod, (pseudonym of William Sharp). The Festival ran until 1925, and is unconnected to the modern festival, founded in 1970.

Recalling ball lightning

In the summer of 1983 or 1984, when I was 13 or 14, my family rented a holiday house



A ball of bright fiery light floated through the kitchen window

on the road to Constantine Bay in Cornwall. There was our immediate family of four, plus my uncle and aunt and their four children and our grandparents. At about 10pm after a very hot day we were getting ready for bed. In my room was my younger sister, myself and our 16-year-old twin cousins. We had a large room with a full-length window running down the middle of the far wall that looked over the bay. We liked to sleep with the curtains and window open to hear the sea. We also like to hear the thunderstorms, as invariably after a hot day we would have one. This night was no exception and it had been thundering for about 20 minutes.

We had just turned the lights off and were chatting when we heard a strange crackling and screeching noise that sounded a bit like a firework. We noticed a light shining in from the window and shot out of bed to see a ball of yellowy fire about the size of a football, slowly coming down the garden about 2ft (60cm) off the ground and straight towards our window. The crackling noise stopped.

We all screamed, which brought Mum and Nan into the room. My Nan ran to the window and shut it and drew the curtains. She told us it was just ball lightning and not to be frightened but to come away from the window. Mum and Nan were born in India and apparently saw things like this frequently there. We could still see the light through the drawn curtains for a few more seconds before it all went dark. I don't remember much more about that night so I'm presuming I went straight to sleep.

I don't recall talking about it again. However, I was chatting with my sister recently and mentioned this event as I was sure I had dreamed it. She didn't remember, so I called my Mum. She remembered and was very matter-of-fact about it. One of my twin cousins remembers but the other one doesn't.

Nicola Maasdam
Lincolnshire

I recently remembered a story my grandfather told me when I was roughly eight years old, about an encounter with what in hindsight sounds like archetypal ball lightning, although he didn't use the term. As I recall, he said it happened in the garden of his family's house in the small town of Parkstone near Poole in Dorset, most probably in the late 1930s or early 1940s. It was the middle of the day, the

weather was calm and he was sitting in the garden playing with his grandmother or aunt when a ball of bright fiery light about the size of a football came through the garden fence and floated silently along a perfectly straight trajectory across the garden and through the kitchen window, penetrating the glass without damaging it – and then disappeared. I wish I had been old enough to have asked him more questions about it.

John Hope
Southbourne, Dorset

Mysterious motorcyclists

I was intrigued by the letter from Francesco Scannella about meeting a young woman beside the Thames and then losing all sense of the mundane world with the arrival of a man in a motorcycle helmet [FT350:75] – and it is this detail that makes me write to you.

At around 12.30pm one night back in 1984, I left a friend's house with my girlfriend and friend. It was a summer night, calm and warm, in Guisborough in the northeast of England. We walked along the high street chatting, crossing the road to where we would walk through a small estate and climb the hill to my friends' houses. We turned a corner and ahead of us was a small gas station in front of which were standing between 10 and 15 people wearing motorcycle crash helmets. There were no bikes to be seen. The figures made no sound, just looked, I believed, straight ahead. "Just keep walking and turn right into the next street," I said quietly to my friends, and we did so, not looking back. On reflection, I think they may have been army cadets on manoeuvres, but something about their silence and the lack of other people and vehicles in the vicinity made me wonder who or what we saw.

Martin Smith
Guisborough, Cleveland

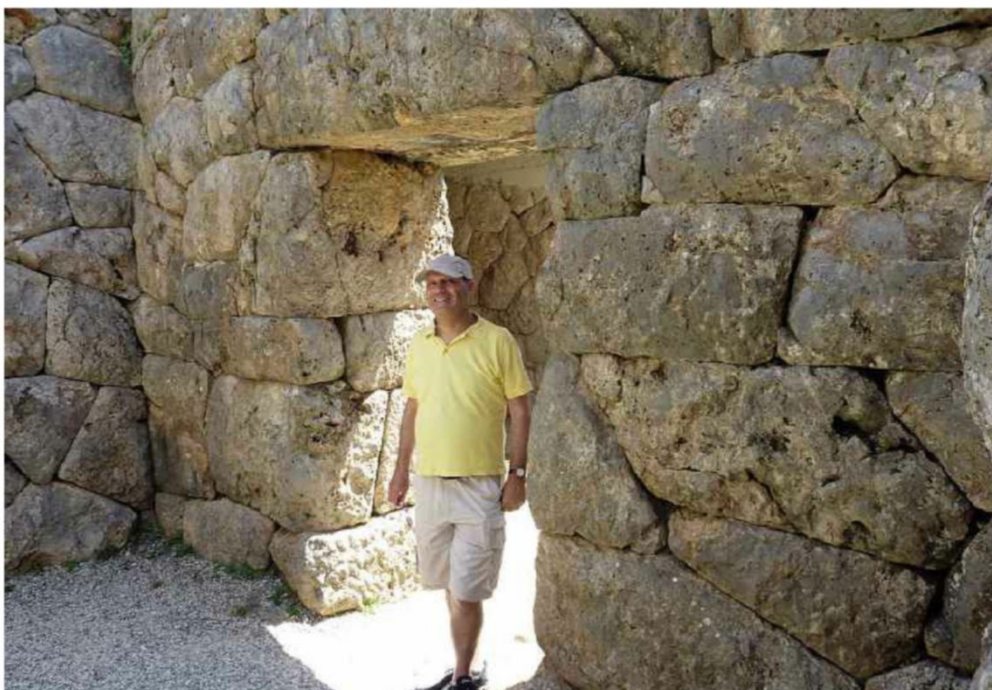
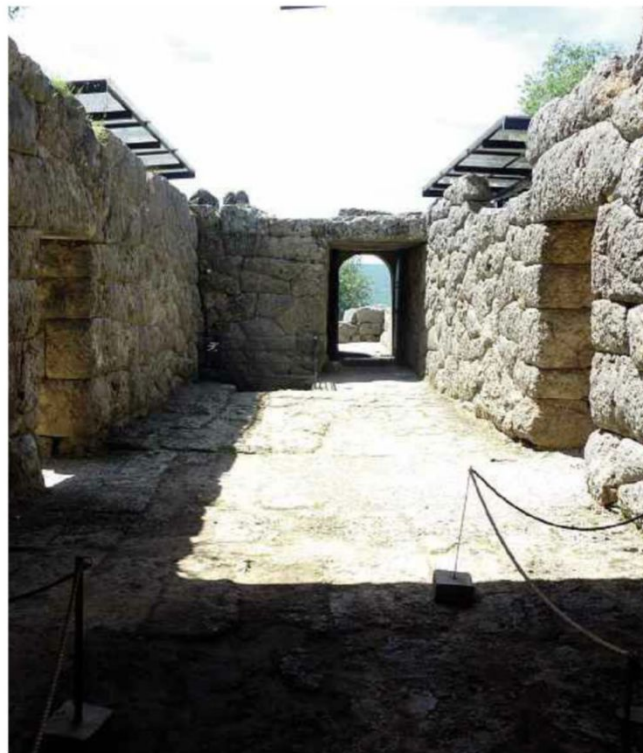
111. Greece's Oracle of the Dead

ULRICH MAGIN follows in the footsteps of Ulysses and explores the ruins of the Nekromanteion, the ancient Greek Oracle of the Dead dedicated to Hades and Persephone. All photographs by the author.

I stood where Ulysses once had stood – under a heavy portal made of giant stones, erected with polygonal masonry in a cyclopean fashion; but I had not drawn my sword and I was not surrounded by the pale shadows of the departed, but exposed to the baking sun and clear blue skies of Greece. I looked up and saw the sea at a distance of a mile or so, where sheer cliffs ended the land.

It was here, at the Nekromanteion, the Oracle of the Dead at Mesopotamos, where the ancient Greeks evoked their dead in a temple of necromancy devoted to the god Hades and the goddess Persephone. And it was exactly here, too, that Homer had placed the hero of his *Odyssey*, questioning the seer Tiresias in the land of the shadows.

Ulysses, says Homer in the *Odyssey* (X, 513), is told by Circe



what to do next:

“When your ship has traversed the waters of Oceanus, you will reach the fertile shore of Proserpine’s country with its groves of tall poplars and willows that shed their fruit untimely; here beach your ship upon the shore of Oceanus, and go straight on to the dark abode of Hades. You will find it near the place where the rivers Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus (which is a branch of the river Styx) flow into Acheron, and you will see a rock near it, just where the two roaring rivers run into one another.”

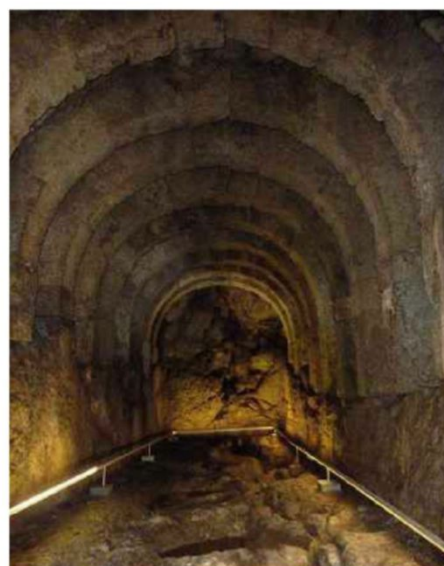
After Homer, the site where you could reach Hades was described by several authors, among them Herodotus (5.92) in the fifth century BC, and by Pausanias in his *Travels in Greece* (I, 17.5). The present building, although archaic looking, was erected in the late fourth century BC and was burned down and destroyed by the invading Romans in 167 BC.

The idea that this was the door to Hades, a place where one could get into immediate contact with the departed, must have been at least as old as Homer, probably even older. The region was first settled by Greek tribes around 2,000 BC – first by the Thesprotes, followed by the Molossians, who conquered part of their territory. In the 14th century BC two Mycenaean towns were founded in the river plains of the Acheron, Ephyra and Toryne. The sparse ruins of Ephyra can still be seen close to the Nekromanteion, and the city plays a major role in several myths about the land of the dead.

As Circe explains, at the time the Oracle was in operation, three rivers met below the rock on which the Nekromanteion stands, and formed a large but shallow lake. The large river was the Acheron, and, flowing into it, there was the Pyriphlegethon (today’s Vouvos), and the Cocytus (modern Mavros).

Where the Acheron runs

ABOVE: The central nave, now open to the heavens. **LEFT:** The author at the gates of Hades.



ABOVE LEFT: The ruins of Ephra can still be seen near the Nekramanteion. ABOVE RIGHT: The underground chamber below the central nave. BELOW: The labyrinth.

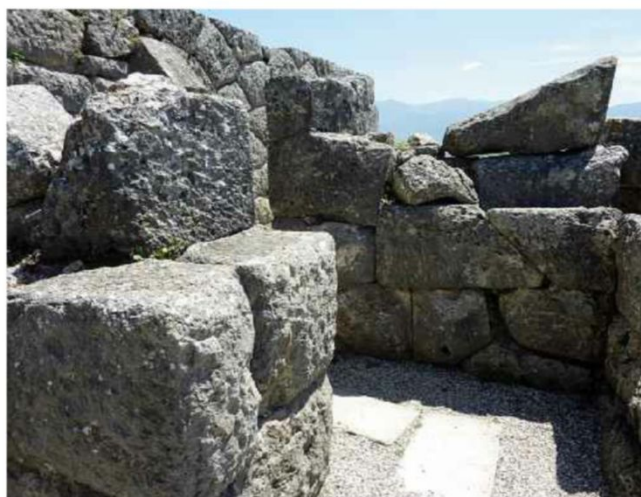
into the sea, we find Cape Cheimerion, the Cape of the Cimmerians, also mentioned by Homer.

Many are the myths that are located here: the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, Heracles dragging the Molossian dog Cerberus from Hades, the story of Theseus and Persephone (who was Queen of Ephra). Since we often read these myths as if they were fantasy tales, it is always fascinating to see how firmly they are fixed to a definite geography. Possibly owing to some solar symbolism, Hades is in the far west of Greece, and Mount Olympus in the far east.

The Nekromanteion, even today, is an imposing site. Although built in the early Hellenistic era, at the end of the fourth and early third century BC, it was erected in the polygonal style we usually identify with the Bronze Age. It definitely looks megalithic – and it was made to impress. To create the present building, all older remains were cleared away and destroyed by the ancients who certainly were not site conservationists in our modern sense.

The Oracle – a square, tower-like affair of 22 by 22m (72 by 72ft) with a foundation of large stones, which would have had a second or several additional floors made of brick – was modelled after the giant grave monuments of Asia Minor, such as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. The site spelled “dead” in a big way.

It is surrounded by an enclosing wall of 62 x 46m (203 by 151ft), which fences off a courtyard with several rooms.



The pilgrim had to negotiate the so-called labyrinth

The central sanctuary has walls 3.3m (11ft) wide. Today, a 19th century fortified house sits in the courtyard, and a mediæval church crowns the former temple.

The modern visitor is guided through the complex by arrows, but this tourist route (through the fortified house, and then right down into a side aisle of the central nave) is completely counter to the convoluted path an ancient initiate would have taken. In antiquity, the pilgrims would have entered through the door in the north, and then have stood in the courtyard, where living quarters for visitors and

priests alike were situated.

The seeker would then have moved into smaller rooms to the east, tiny cubicles the size of a working space in a cube farm. Here, he spent several days in complete darkness. The time was used for incubation sleep, ritual baths, and meals of pork, barley bread, fava beans and mussels. During this time, the priests gave him advice on how exactly to carry out the rituals and how to deal with the ill-natured dead and the demons he would encounter.

After days of darkness and isolation, the pilgrim was most likely led to another room where he spent further time in isolation. When the priest decided he was ready for contact, the pilgrim had to go down a corridor and negotiate the so-called labyrinth, a meandering layout intended to confuse his sense of direction.

Passing through heavy oak doors under a massive lintel, he entered the inner sanctum,

a long hall with a rough pavement. It was the central nave of the three naves of the building. Here, the priests called out for “Hecate and the horrible Persephone”, and the pilgrims poured libations. The side naves (containing three rooms each) held offerings, food and goods the pilgrims brought to the temple. In Book XI, Odysseus narrates: “I made a drink-offering to all the dead, first with honey and milk, then with wine, and thirdly with water, and I sprinkled white barley meal over the whole, praying earnestly to the poor feckless ghosts, and promising them that when I got back to Ithaca I would sacrifice a barren heifer for them, the best I had, and would load the pyre with good things. I also particularly promised that Teiresias should have a black sheep to himself, the best in all my flocks. When I had prayed sufficiently to the dead, I cut the throats of the two sheep and let the blood run into the trench, whereon the ghosts came trooping up.” Later pilgrims will have done and said something similar.

Archæologists have found the remains of lupins and fava beans in the large vessels stored in the side naves. Both plants are hallucinogenic in character, and also cause wind, allergic syndromes, vertigo and stomach ache.

And, just to be sure that the pilgrim – weakened by darkness, fatigue and isolation, filled up to the armpits with hallucinogenic toxins – would really see his dead relatives or some demons, the central nave was equipped with a carefully crafted



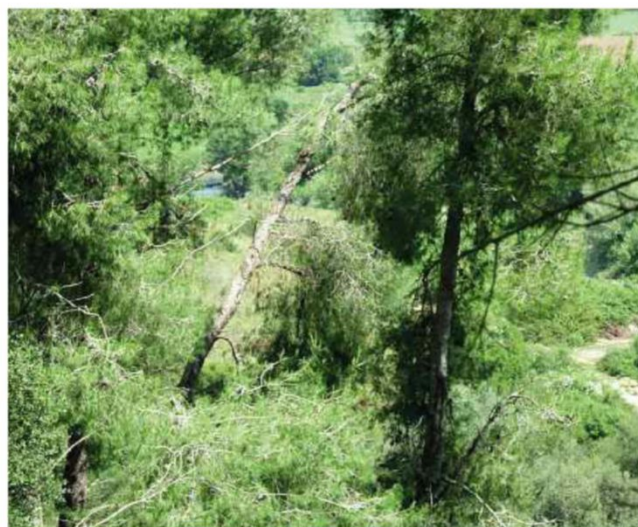
ABOVE: The enclosing wall now houses a mediæval church. ABOVE: A view from the Nekromanteion toward the Acheron.

automaton that provided an almost cinematographic apparition of the departed in an incense-filled atmosphere. Archaeologists have excavated a number of metallic gears, counter weights and other mechanical remains of a complex machine.

But it may not all have been pious deceit, a spirit-ex-machina, so to speak.

Below the central nave is an underground chamber that is exactly the same size as the nave, into which the libations would have dropped. It is hewn into the living rock, the ceiling held by monumentally large stone arches. This artificial grotto was hermetically sealed in ancient times, and was inaccessible to worshippers and priests alike. Here, we see that not all was fake, that even the cunning priests had created a sacred taboo for themselves. Perhaps, among all the machinery, they felt the ground was thin as ice, with the thirsty spirits lurking beneath the soles of their sandals. The pilgrim left the cult room by a different route, though still through the eastern corridor. Perhaps trapdoors and stairways to the second floor were used to further confuse the visitor.

The Oracle as we see it today was in use for less than 300 years. To build it, all earlier, and very possibly Mycenæan ruins, were cleared, and then the Romans burned down



Thirsty spirits lurked beneath the soles of their sandals

the whole complex in 167 BC when they invaded Greece. As the Oracle contained piles of sulphur, the site went up in flames like a volcano.

The Romans, as fond as they were of Greek myth, disregarded the place. They had their own Oracle at Cumæ near Naples (see FT346:32-37). Later Romans built living quarters on the hill; later still, the church of St John the Baptist was constructed over the central

underground sanctum (though not in line with its axis) in the early 18th century. The strong polygonal walls were incorporated into a fortified house in the 19th century. Both are preserved, and the ancient ruins around them have been excavated, and recently restored, and explanatory posters have been installed.

Just a stroll away you see the Mycenæan city of Ephra, of the late Bronze Age. Little remains but fallen-down enclosure walls, and the site was closed when I visited. Many archæological remains in Greece are fenced off, with an entrance hut, but the state has no longer the means to man them.

We finished our visit with a boat trip on the River Acheron

(they leave from Ammoudia, and are signposted along the road with “Delta of the River Acheron”). The Acheron is the branch of the Styx that flows into the sea in our dimension.

We pay the ferryman, and after a cruise of more than one and a half hours along the willow-framed, green-blue river where we are completely lost as to time and geographical orientation, we arrive safely at the banks, having crossed the Styx and lived to tell the tale.

It is hard to imagine the otherworldly, foggy atmosphere at the end of the world described by Homer in the neat and pretty little town of Mesopotamos, sitting beneath a clear blue sky, but as my partner Susanne points out, it might have looked completely different 3,000 years ago, with the large shallow lake, the swampland, and the overflowing rivers that meet below the rock. The terrain must have been far more difficult to negotiate then, and was actually in the far west: go further and you enter Corfu, the fairyland of the Phæacians, who have no contact with living people.

So, read your Homer, but don't be put off by his description of the bleak, half-lit landscape (“... the land and city of the Cimmerians who live enshrouded in mist and darkness which the rays of the Sun never pierce neither at his rising nor as he goes down again out of the heavens, but the poor wretches live in one long melancholy night.”). It's quite idyllic these days, with its lakes, papyrus, and rushing water, and I can thoroughly recommend a trip to Hades and a cruise on the Styx.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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PHENOMENOMIX William Blake 2 HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

WILLIAM BLAKE MARRIED A YOUNG WOMAN NAMED CATHERINE BOUCHER, WHO PROVED TO BE A DEVOTED WIFE! THEY LIVED HAPPILY TOGETHER FOR THE REST OF HIS LONG LIFE!



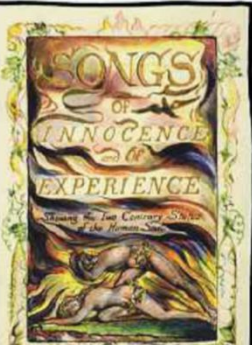
THEIR HAPPINESS WAS BRIEFLY CLOUDED BY THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER ROBERT— BUT NOT FOR LONG! BLAKE SAW HIS BROTHER'S SOUL FLYING UP TO HEAVEN, CLAPPING HIS HANDS FOR JOY!



...AND ROBERT WOULD DROP BY THEIR HOUSE QUITE OFTEN FOR A CHAT! HE SHOWED BLAKE A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR ENGRAVING...



IN THE FEW SPARE HOURS HE HAD AFTER WORK, BLAKE BEGAN TO WRITE, ILLUSTRATE, AND PRINT HIS OWN POEMS! HE BEGAN WITH SIMPLE, ALMOST CHILD-LIKE LYRICS...



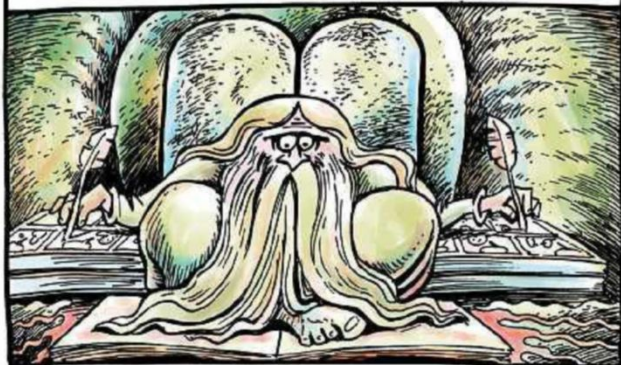
*Little lamb
who made thee?
Dost thou know*

BUT THEN HE BEGAN TO WRITE LONGER, STRANGER POEMS, SOME OF THEM INSPIRED BY CONTEMPORARY POLITICS...

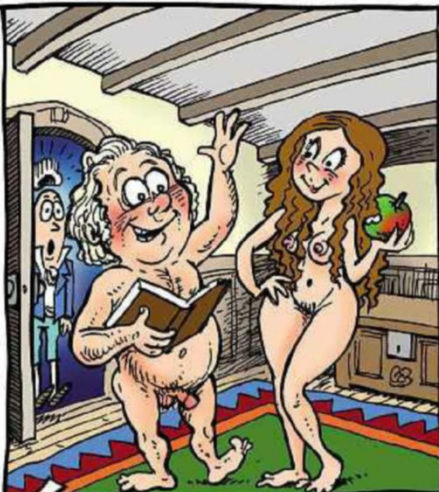


AT FIRST HE WAS A GREAT ADMIRER OF THE REVOLUTIONS IN AMERICA AND FRANCE...

HE MOVED ON TO EVEN LONGER, EVEN STRANGER POEMS, FILLED WITH CHARACTERS AND PLACES FROM HIS OWN IMAGINATION— LOS, ENITHARMON, AND URIZEN!



THOUGH HIS FEW FRIENDS LOVED HIM, THEY FOUND HIM MORE AND MORE ECCENTRIC! ONE OF THEM ONCE WALKED IN ON MR. AND MRS. BLAKE NAKED, PLAYING AT ADAM AND EVE, WHILE BLAKE READ FROM "PARADISE LOST"...



BLAKE WAS A GREAT FAN OF THE POET MILTON, WHOSE SPIRIT OFTEN DROPPED BY TO CHAT WITH HIM...

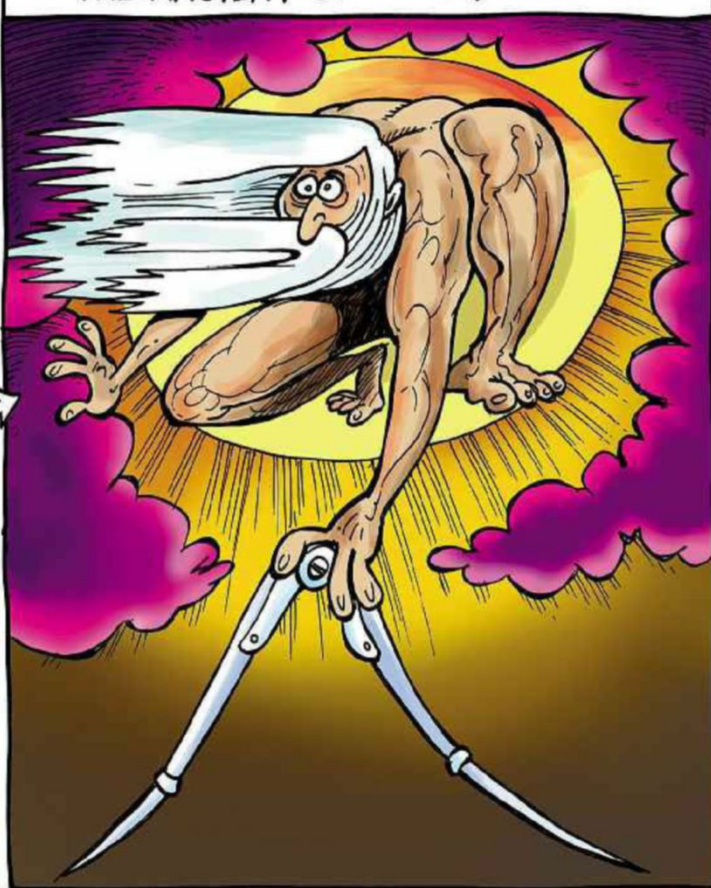


BLAKE MADE A STRICT DISTINCTION BETWEEN SPIRITS AND GHOSTS!

THE ONLY "GHOST" HE CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN WAS A SINISTER OLD MAN AT THE TOP OF HIS STAIRS...



IN LATER YEARS BLAKE USED THE MEMORY OF THIS GHOST FOR HIS FAMOUS PICTURE "THE ANCIENT OF DAYS"!



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HIS MONSTERS OF THE DEEP



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FORTEAN TIMES 355

ON SALE 22 JUNE 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Since 1995, apparently healthy children around Muzaffarpur in Bihar, northern India, have suffered sudden seizures and lost consciousness. About 40 per cent of them died – 100 children every year. Doctors variously ascribed the phenomenon to heat stroke; to infections carried by rats, bats, or sandflies; or to pesticides used in the ubiquitous lychee orchards. The Muzaffarpur area produces about 70 per cent of India's lychee harvest. New research, published in *The Lancet Global Health* (30 Jan 2017), suggests the children were poisoned by eating lychees on an empty stomach. Most were poor children who ate fruit that had fallen to the ground. Lychees contain toxins that inhibit the body's ability to produce glucose, which affected young children whose blood sugar levels were already low because they were malnourished. They woke screaming in the night before suffering convulsions and losing consciousness as they suffered acute swelling of the brain.

Researchers examining sick children admitted to hospital in Muzaffarpur in 2014 found a link to an outbreak of 'Jamaican vomiting sickness' that caused brain swelling and convulsions in West Indian children. That outbreak was traced to the ackee fruit, which contains hypoglycin, a toxin that prevents the body from making glucose. Tests then showed that lychees also contained hypoglycin, as well as methylenecyclopropyl glycine (MCPG), with higher levels in unripe fruit. Outbreaks of the illness usually begin in mid-May and end in July, around the time lychees are harvested. Health officials now tell parents to make sure young children get an evening meal and limit the number of lychees they eat. *livescience.com*, 31 Jan; *BBC News*, 1 Feb; *NY Times*, 2 Feb 2017.

Two Zimbabweans who stabbed their wives to death were acquitted last January after successfully persuading judges that they thought the women were witchcraft-created goblins. Mikiana Sandako, 24, was acquitted by Masvingo High Judge Justice Joseph Mafusire for fatally stabbing his sleeping wife after mistaking her for a goblin that was punching him. Lucy Chivasa, who represented Sandako, told the court that Sandako felt blows raining down on him. "He woke up and stabbed his wife in the neck using a chisel," she

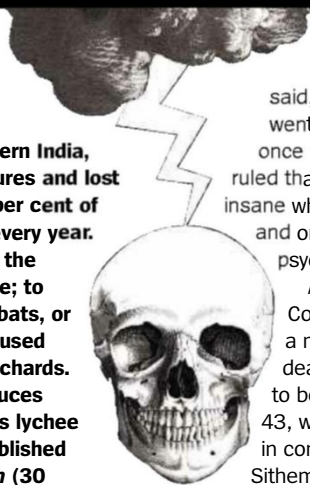
said, adding mysteriously: "He went ahead and stabbed himself once on the neck." Justice Mafusire ruled that Sandako was temporarily insane when he committed the crime and ordered him to be kept under psychiatric observation.

A week earlier, Bulawayo High Court judge Francis Bere acquitted a man from Nkayi who axed to death a woman he also suspected to be a goblin. Sibangilizwe Moyo, 43, was facing a murder charge in connection with the death of Sithembiso Tshuma. Moyo said he axed Tshuma to death after she emerged from the darkness, blocked his way, and tried to strangle him. *newobserveronline.com*, 18 Jan 2017

A man found dead in a field near Canterbury, Kent, in early February has yet to be identified. He was carrying a black 'cabin case' containing toiletries, clothes and a book called *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychological Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care*. He was in his mid-fifties to late sixties, slim to skinny, and around 5ft 6in (168cm) tall. The cause of death had not been confirmed, but police were convinced it was not suspicious. *D.Mirror*, 27 Feb 2017.

Four years ago, a man walking his dog by Westwood Power Station near Wigan, Greater Manchester, noticed the body of a young man hanging from an electrical pylon roughly 10ft (3m) above the ground. He was dressed in "casual" clothing and had an olive complexion, suggesting a Middle Eastern ethnicity. His pockets contained £85 in cash, a packet of Amber Leaf tobacco with a number of roll-up cigarettes, and a one-way ticket for the 600 bus service from Leigh to Wigan, dated for the previous day. He has yet to be identified, but there was no reason to suspect foul play.

The death recalled the mystery of Todd Sees, who lived at Montour Ridge, West Chillisquaque Township, Pennsylvania. On 2 August 2002, the avid deer hunter had driven his four-wheeler up to a power line clearing to search for signs prior to the opening of deer season. Two days later, his body was found suspended above the ground in a thickly overgrown area. Apart from his underwear, most of his clothing was missing, and some reports suggested his remains looked "emaciated". The time and cause of death remain unknown. *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 20 Mar 2017.



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